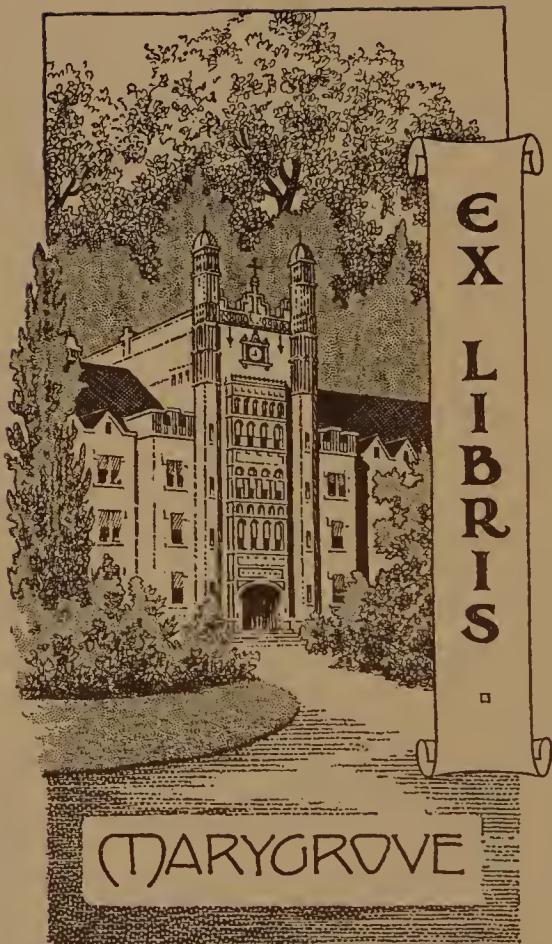




SPENCER NICHOLS

# THE BOOK OF EARTH

BY ALFRED NOYES







THE TORCH-BEARERS—II

THE BOOK OF EARTH

*WORKS OF ALFRED NOYES*

COLLECTED POEMS—*3 Vols.*

THE LORD OF MISRULE

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POEMS

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THE GOLDEN HYNDE

THE NEW MORNING

*The Torch-Bearers—*

WATCHERS OF THE SKY

THE BOOK OF EARTH

THE TORCH-BEARERS—II  
THE BOOK OF  
EARTH

BY  
ALFRED NOYES



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## I—THE BOOK OF EARTH

### I

#### THE GRAND CANYON

LET the stars fade. Open the Book of Earth.

Out of the Painted Desert, in broad noon,  
Walking through pine-clad bluffs, in an air  
    like wine,  
I came to the dreadful brink.

I saw, with a swimming brain, the solid earth  
Splitting apart, into two hemispheres,  
Cleft, as though by the axe of an angry god.  
On the brink of the Grand Canyon,  
Over that reeling gulf of amethyst shadows,  
From the edge of one sundered hemisphere I  
    looked down,  
Down from abyss to abyss,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Into the dreadful heart of the old earth  
dreaming

Like a slaked furnace of her far beginnings,  
The inhuman ages, alien as the moon,  
Æons unborn, and the unimagined end.

There, on the terrible brink, against the sky,  
I saw a black speck on a boulder jutting  
Over a hundred forests that dropped and  
dropped

Down to a tangle of red precipitous gorges  
That dropped again and dropped, endlessly  
down.

A mile away, or ten, on its jutting rock,  
The black speck moved. In that dry diamond  
light

It seemed so near me that my hand could  
touch it.

It stirred like a midge, cleaning its wings in  
the sun.

All measure was lost. It broke—into five  
black dots.

I looked, through the glass, and saw that these  
were men.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Beyond them, round them, under them, swam  
the abyss  
Endlessly on.

Far down, as a cloud sailed over,  
A sun-shaft struck, between forests and sand-  
stone cliffs,  
Down, endlessly down, to the naked and  
dusky granite,  
Crystalline granite that still seemed to glow  
With smouldering colours of those buried  
fires  
Which formed it, long ago, in earth's deep  
womb.

And there, so far below that not a sound,  
Even in that desert air, rose from its bed,  
I saw the thin green thread of the Colorado,  
The dragon of rivers, dwarfed to a vein of  
jade,  
The Colorado that, out of the Rocky Moun-  
tains,  
For fifteen hundred miles of glory and  
thunder,  
Rolls to the broad Pacific.

From Flaming Gorge,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Through the Grand Canyon with its monstrous chain

Of subject canyons, the green river flows,  
Linking them all together in one vast gulch,  
But christening it, at each earth-cleaving turn,  
With names like pictures, for six hundred miles:

*Black Canyon*, where it rushes in opal foam;  
*Red Canyon*, where it sleeks to jade again  
And slides through quartz, three thousand feet below;

*Split-Mountain Canyon*, with its cottonwood trees;

And, opening out of this, *Whirlpool Ravine*,  
Where the wild rapids wash the gleaming walls

With rainbows, for nine miles of mist and fire;

*Kingfisher Canyon*, gorgeous as the plumes  
Of its wingèd denizens, glistening with all hues;

*Glen Canyon*, where the Cave of Music rang  
Long since, with the discoverers' desert-song;  
*Vermilion Cliffs*, like sunset clouds congealed

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

To solid crags; the *Valley of Surprise*  
Where blind walls open, into a Titan pass;  
*Labyrinth Canyon*, and the *Valley of Echoes*;  
*Cataract Canyon*, rolling boulders down  
In floods of emerald thunder; *Gunnison's*  
*Valley*  
Crossed, once, by the forgotten Spanish  
Trail;  
Then, for a hundred miles, *Desolation*  
*Canyon*,  
Savagely pinnacled, strange as the lost road  
Of Death, cleaving a long deserted world;  
*Gray Canyon* next; then *Marble Canyon*,  
stained  
With iron-rust above, but brightly veined  
As Parian, where the wave had sculptured it;  
Then deep *Still-water*.

And all these conjunct  
In one huge chasm, were but the towering  
gates  
And dim approaches to the august abyss  
That opened here,—one sempiternal page  
Baring those awful hieroglyphs of stone,  
Seven systems, and seven ages, darkly scrolled

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

In the deep Book of Earth.

Across the gulf  
I looked to that vast coast opposed, whose  
crests  
Of raw rough amethyst, over the Canyon,  
flamed,  
A league away, or ten. No eye could tell.  
All measure was lost. The tallest pine was a  
feather  
Under my feet, in that ocean of violet gloom.  
Then, with a dizzying brain, I saw below me,  
A little way out, a tiny shape, like a gnat  
Flying and spinning,—now like a gilded  
grain  
Of dust in a shaft of light, now sharp and  
black  
Over a blood-red sandstone precipice.

“Look!”  
The Indian guide thrust out a lean dark hand  
That hid a hundred forests, and pointed to it,  
Muttering low, “Big Eagle!”

All that day,  
Riding along the brink, we found no end.  
Still, on the right, the pageant of the Abyss

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Unfolded. There gigantic walls of rock,  
Sheer as the world's end, seemed to float in air  
Over the hollow of space, and change their  
forms

Like soft blue wood-smoke, with each change  
of light.

Here massed red boulders, over the Angel  
Trail

Darkened to thunder, or like a sunset burned.  
Here, while the mind reeled from the im-  
agined plunge,

Tall amethystine towers, dark Matterhorns,  
Rose out of shadowy nothingness to crown  
Their mighty heads with morning.

Here, wild crags

Black and abrupt, over the swimming dimness  
Of coloured mist, and under the moving  
clouds,

Themselves appeared to move, stately and  
slow

As the moon moves, with an invisible pace,  
Or darkling planets, quietly onward steal  
Through their immense dominion.

There, far down,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

A phantom sword, a search-beam of the sun,  
Glanced upon purple pyramids, and set  
One facet aflame in each, the rest in gloom;  
While from their own deep chasms of  
    shadow, that seemed  
Small inch-wide rings of darkness round  
    them, rose  
Tabular foothills, mesas, hard and bright,  
Bevelled and flat, like gems; or, softly  
    bloomed  
Like alabaster, stained with lucid wine;  
Then slowly changed, under the changing  
    clouds,  
Where the light sharpened, into monstrous  
    tombs  
Of trap-rock, hornblende, greenstone and  
    basalt.

There,—under isles of pine, washed round  
    with mist,  
Dark isles that seemed to sail through heaven,  
    and cliffs  
That towered like Teneriffe,—far, far be-  
    low,  
.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Striving to link those huge dissolving steeps,  
Gigantic causeways drowned or swam in  
vain,

Column on column, arch on broken arch,  
Groping and winding, like the foundered  
spans

Of lost Atlantis, under the weltering deep.

For, over them, the abysmal tides of air,  
Inconstant as the colours of the sea,  
From amethyst into wreathing opal flowed,  
Ebbed into rose through grey, then melted all  
In universal amethyst again.

There, wild cathedrals, with light-splintering  
spires,

Shone like a dream in the Eternal mind  
And changed as earth and sea and heaven  
must change.

Over them soared a promontory, black  
As night, but in the deepening gulf beyond,  
Far down in that vast hollow of violet air,  
Winding between the huge Plutonian walls,  
The semblance of a ruined city lay.

Dungeons flung wide, and palaces brought  
low,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Altars and temples, wrecked and overthrown,

Gigantic stairs that climbed into the light  
And found no hope, and ended in the void:  
It burned and darkened, a city of porphyry,  
Paved with obsidian, walled with serpentine,  
Beautiful, desolate, stricken as by strange  
gods

Who, long ago, from cloudy summits, flung  
Boulder on mountainous boulder of blood-red marl

Into a gulf so deep that, when they fell,  
The soft wine-tinted mists closed over them  
Like ocean, and the Indian heard no sound.

## II

### NIGHT AND THE ABYSS

A LONELY cabin, like an eagle's nest,  
Lodged us that night upon the monstrous  
brink,  
And roofed us from the burning desert stars;  
But, on my couch of hemlock as I lay,  
The Book of Earth still opened in my  
dreams.

Below me, only guessed by the slow sound  
Of forests, through unfathomable gulfs  
Of midnight, vaster, more mysterious now,  
Breathed that invisible Presence of deep awe.  
Through the wide open window, once, a moth  
Beat its dark wings, and flew—out—over  
that,

Brave little fluttering atheist, unaware  
Of aught beyond the reach of his antennæ,  
Thinking his light quick thoughts; while,  
under him,  
God opened His immeasurable Abyss.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

All night I heard the insistent whisper rise:  
*One page of Earth's abysmal Book lies bare.*  
*Read—in its awful hieroglyphs of stone—*  
*His own deep scripture. Is its music sealed?*  
*Or is the inscrutable secret growing clearer?*  
Then, like the night-wind, soughing through  
the pines,

Another voice replied, cold with despair:  
*It opens, and it opens. By what Power?*  
*A silent river, hastening to the sea,*  
*Age after age, through crumbling desert rocks*  
*Clove the dread chasm. Wild snows that had*  
*their birth*

*In Ocean-mists, and folded their white wings*  
*Among far mountains, fed that sharp-edged*  
*stream.*

*Ask Ocean whence it came. Ask Earth. Ask*  
*Heaven.*

*I see the manifold instruments as they move,*  
*Remote or near, with intricate inter-play;*  
*But that which moves them, and determines*  
*all*

*Remains in darkness. Man must bow his*  
*head*

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

*Before the Inscrutable.*

Then, far off, I heard,  
As from a deeper gulf, the antiphonal voice:  
*It opens, and it opens, and it opens,—*  
*The abyss of Heaven, the rock-leaved Book of*  
*Earth,*  
*And that Abyss as dreadful and profound*  
*Locked in each atom.*

*Under the high stars,*  
*Man creeps, too infinitesimal to be scanned;*  
*And, over all the worlds that dwindle away*  
*Beyond the uttermost microscopic sight,*  
*He towers—a god.*

*Midway, between the height*  
*That crushes, and the depth that flatters him,*  
*He stands within the little ring of light*  
*He calls his knowledge. Its horizon-line,*  
*The frontier of the dark, was narrow, once;*  
*And he could bear it. But the light is grow-*  
*ing;*  
*The ring is widening; and, with each*  
*increase,*  
*The frontiers of the night are widening, too.*  
*They grow and grow. The very blaze of truth*

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

*That drives them back, enlarges the grim  
coasts  
Of utter darkness.*

*Man must bow his head  
Before the Inscrutable.*

Then, from far within,  
The insistent whisper rose:

*Man is himself  
The key to all he seeks.  
He is not exiled from this majesty,  
But is himself a part of it. To know  
Himself, and read this Book of Earth aright;  
Flooding it as his ancient poets, once,  
Illumed old legends with their inborn fire,  
Were to discover music that out-soars  
His plodding thought, and all his fables, too;  
A song of truth that deepens, not destroys  
The ethereal realm of wonder; and still lures  
The spirit of man on more adventurous quests  
Into the wildest mystery of all,  
The miracle of reality, which he shares.*

But O, what art could guide me through that  
maze?

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

What kingly shade unlock the music sealed  
In that dread volume?

Sons of an earlier age,  
Poet and painter stretched no guiding hand.

Even the gaunt spirit, whom the Mantuan led  
Through the dark chasms and fiery clefts of  
    pain,

Could set a bound to his own realms of  
    night,

Enwall then round, build his own stairs to  
    heaven,

And slept now, prisoned, in his own coiling  
    towers. . . .

Leonardo—found a shell among the hills,  
A sea-shell, turned to stone, as at the gaze  
Of his own cold Medusa. His dark eyes,  
Hawk-swift to hunt the subtle lines of law  
Through all the forms of beauty, on that wild  
    height

Saw how the waves of a forgotten world  
Had washed and sculptured every soaring  
    crag,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Ere Italy was born. He stood alone,—  
His rose-red cloak out-rippling on the  
breeze,—  
A wondering sun-god. Through the moun-  
tain-peaks,  
The rumour of a phantom ocean rolled.  
It tossed a flying rainbow at his feet  
And vanished. . . .

Milton—walked in Paradise.  
He saw the golden compasses of God  
Turning through darkness to create the world.  
He saw the creatures of a thousand æons  
Rise, in six days, out of the mire and clay,  
Pawing for freedom. With the great blind  
power  
Of his own song, he riveted one more clasp,  
Though wrought of fabulous gold, on that  
dark Book,  
Not to be loosed for centuries.

Nearer yet,  
Goethe, the torch of science in his own hand,  
Poet and seeker, pressed into the dark,  
Caught one mysterious gleam from flower and  
leaf,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

And one from man's own frame, of that which binds

All forms of life together. He turned aside  
And lost it, saying, "I wait for light, more light."

And these all towered among celestial glories,

And wore their legends like prophetic robes;  
But who should teach me, in this deeper night,

The tale of this despised and wandering house,

Our lodge among the stars; the song of Earth;

Her birth in a mist of fire,—a ball of flame,  
Slowly contracting, crusting, cracking and folding

Into deep valleys and mountains that still changed

And slowly rose and sank like age-long waves  
On the dark ocean of ever-dissolving forms;  
Earth, a magical globe, an elfin sphere,  
Quietly turning through boundlessness,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Budding with miracles, burgeoning into life;  
A murmuring forest of ferns, where the misty  
sun  
Saw wingèd monsters fighting to bring forth  
men;  
Earth, and her savage youth, her monstrous  
lusts,  
Mastered and curbed, till these, too, pulsed  
into music,  
And became for man the fountain of his own  
power;  
Earth, on her shining way,  
Coloured and warmed by the sun, and quietly  
spinning  
Her towns and seas to shadow and light in  
turn;  
Earth, by what brooding Power  
Endowed at birth with those dread potencies  
Which out of her teeming womb at last  
brought forth  
Creatures that loved and sinned, laughed,  
wept and prayed,  
Died, and returned to the unknown Power  
that made them;

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Earth, and that tale of men, the kings of  
thought,

Who strove to read her secret in the rocks,  
And turned, amid wild calumny and wrong,  
The lucid sword-like search-beams of the  
mind

On the dark passion that through uncounted  
æons

Crept, fought, and climbed to the celestial  
gates,

Three gates in one, one heavenly gate in  
three,

Whose golden names are Beauty, Goodness,  
Truth.

Then, without sound, like an unspoken  
prayer,

The voice I heard upon the mountain height,  
Out of a deeper gulf of midnight rose,  
Within me, or without, invoking One  
To whom this dust, not of itself, would pray:

Muse of the World, O terrible, beautiful  
Spirit,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Throned in pure light, since all the worlds  
obey

Thy golden law which, even here on earth,  
Though followed blindly, leads to thy pure  
realm,

Couldst thou deliver me from this night at  
last,

Teach me the burning syllables of thy tongue  
That I, even I, out of the mire and clay,  
With face uplifted, and with arms up-  
stretched

To the Eternal Sun of Truth, might raise  
My song of adoration, not in vain.

Throned above Time, thou sawest when earth  
was born

In darkness, though none else was there to see;  
For there was fury in the dark, and fire,  
And power, and that creative pulse of thine,  
The throb of music, the deep rhythmic  
throes

Of That which made and binds all worlds in  
one.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*       \*

*In the beginning, God made heaven and  
earth.*

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

One sentence burned upon the formless  
dark—

One sentence, and no more, from that high  
realm.

The long-sought consummation of all law,  
Through all this manifold universe, might  
shine clear

In those eight words one day; not yet; not  
yet!

They would be larger, then;  
Not the glib prelude to a lifeless creed,  
But wide as the unbounded realms of thought,  
The last great simplification of them all,  
The single formula, like an infinite sphere  
Enfolding Space and Time, atoms and suns,  
With all the wild fantastic hosts of life  
And all their generations, through all worlds,  
In one pure phrase of music, like a star  
Seen in a distant sky.

I could not reach it.

All night I waited for the word in vain.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

### III

#### THE WINGS

NIGHT greyed, and up the immeasurable abyss,  
Brimmed with a blacker night than ocean knew,  
The dawn-wind, like a host of spirits, flowed,  
Chanting those airy melodies which, long since,  
The same wild breath, obeying the same law,  
Taught the first pine-woods in the primal world.

*We are the voices.  
Could man only  
    Spell our tongue,  
He might learn  
    The inscrutable secret  
        And grow young.*

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

*Young as we are  
Who, on shores  
Unknown to man,  
Long, long since,  
In waves and woods  
Our song began.*

*Ere his footsteps  
Printed earth,  
Wild ferns and grass  
Breathed it. No man  
Heard that whispering  
Spirit pass.*

*Not one mortal  
Lay and listened.  
There was none  
Even to hear  
The sea-wave crumbling  
In the sun.*

*None to hear  
Our choral pine-woods  
Chanting deep,*

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

*Even as now  
Our solemn cadence  
Haunts your sleep.*

*Ear was none  
To heed or hear  
When earth was young.*

*Even now  
Man understands not  
Our strange tongue.*

There came a clearer rustle of nearer boughs.

A bird cried, once, a sharp ecstatic cry  
As if it saw an angel.

He stood there  
Against the window's dusky square of sky,  
Carrying the long curled crosier of a fern,  
My singer of the woods, my Shadow-of-a-Leaf,  
The invisible friend with whom I used to talk  
In childhood, and that none but I could see,—

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Shadow-of-a-Leaf, shy whisperer of the songs  
That none could capture, and so few could  
hear;

A creature of the misty hills of home,  
Quick as the thought that hides in the deep  
heart

When the loud world goes by; vivid to me  
As flesh and blood, yet with an elfin strain  
That set him free of earth, free to run wild  
Through all the ethereal kingdoms of the  
mind,

His dark eyes fey with wonder at the world,  
And that profoundest mystery of all,  
The miracle of reality; clear, strange eyes,  
Deep-sighted, joyous, touched with hidden  
tears.

Often he left me when I was not worthy;  
And many a time I locked my heart against  
him,

Only to find him creeping in again  
Like memory, or a wild vine through a  
window

When I most needed that still voice of his  
Which never yet spoke louder than the breath

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Of conscience in my soul. He would return  
Quietly as the rustling of a bough  
After the bird has flown; and, through a  
    rift

Of evening sky, the shining eyes of a child,  
The cold clear ripple of thrushes after rain,  
The sound of a mountain-brook, or a  
    breaking wave

Would teach my slumbering soul the ways of  
    love.

He looked at me, more gently than of late,  
And spoke (O, if this world had ears to hear  
The sound of falling dew, the power that  
    wrote

The Paradiso might recall that voice!)

*It is near daybreak. I am faithful still;*

*And I am here to answer all your need.*

*The hills are old, but not so old as I;*

*The blackbird's eyes are young, but not so  
    young*

*As mine that know the wonder of their sight.*

*Eagles have wings. Mine are too swift to see;*

*For while I stand and whisper at your side,*

*Time dwindleth to a shadow. . . .*

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Like a mist

The world dissolved around us as he spoke.  
I saw him standing dark against the sky.  
I heard him, murmuring like a spirit in  
trance,—

*Dawn on Crotona, dawn without a cloud. . . .*

Then, slowly emerging from that mist of  
dreams,  
As at an incantation, a lost world  
Arose, and shone before me in the dawn.



## II—THE GREEKS

### I

#### PYTHAGORAS

##### I. THE GOLDEN BROTHERHOOD

**D**AWN on Crotona, dawn without a cloud.

In the still garden that Pythagoras made,  
The Temple of the Muses, firm as truth,  
Lucid as beauty, the white marriage-song  
Made visible, of beauty and truth in one,  
Flushed with the deepening East.

It was no dream.

The thrush that with his long beak shook and beat  
The dark striped snail-shell on the marble flags  
Between the cool white columns told me this.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

The birds among the silvery olives pealed  
So many jargonizing rivulet-throated bells  
That in their golden clashings discord  
drowned,  
And one wild harmony closed and crowned  
them all  
And yet, as if the spread wings of a hawk  
Froze in the sky above them, every note  
Died on an instant.

Over the sparkling grass  
The long dark shadows of ash and pine began  
To shrink, as though the rising of the sun  
Menaced, not only shadows, but the world.

A frightened bird flew, crying, and scattering  
dew  
Blindly away; though, on this dawn of dawns,  
Nothing had changed. The Golden Brother-  
hood stole  
Up through the drifts of wet rose-laurel  
bloom  
As on so many a dawn for many a year,  
To make their morning vows.

They thronged the porch,  
[30]

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

The lean athletes of truth, trained body and  
mind,  
For their immortal trial. Among them  
towered  
Milon, the soldier-wrestler. His brown  
limbs  
Moved with the panther's grace, the warrior's  
pride;  
Milon, who in the Olympic contests won  
Crown after crown, but wore them on  
broad brows  
Cut like fine steel for thought; and, in his  
eyes,  
Carried the light of those deep distances  
That challenge the spirit of man.

They entered in;  
And, like the very Muses following them,  
Theano, and her Golden Sisterhood,  
First of that chosen womanhood, by the grace  
Of whose heaven-walking souls the race  
ascends,  
Passed through the shining porch.

It was no dream.  
In the bright marble, under the sandalled feet,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And in the glimmering columns as they  
passed,  
The reflex of their flowing vestments glowed  
White, violet, saffron, like another dawn.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

Before them, through the temple's fragrant  
gloom,  
The Muses, in their dim half-circle, towered ;  
And, in the midst, over the smouldering  
myrrh,  
The form of Hestia.

In her mighty shadow,  
Pythagoras, with a scroll in his right hand,  
Arose and spoke.

“Our work is well-nigh done.  
Our enemies are closing round us now.  
I have given the sacred scrolls into the  
hands  
Of Lysis ; and, though all else be destroyed,  
If but a Golden Verse or two live on  
In other lands, and kindle other souls  
To seek the law, our work is not in vain.  
If it be death that comes to us, we shall lose

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Nothing that could endure. It was not chance

That sent us on this pilgrimage through time,

But that which lives within us, the desire  
Of gods, to know what once was dark in heaven.

Gods were not gods who, in eternal bliss,  
Had never known this wonder—the deep joy  
Of coming home. But we have purchased it,  
And now return, enriched with memories  
Of mortal love, terrestrial grief and pain,  
Into our own lost realm."

His dark eyes flashed.

He lifted his proud head as one who heard  
Strains of immortal music even now.

He towered among the Muses in the dusk,  
And then, as though he, too, were carved in  
stone,

And all their voices breathed through his own  
voice,

"Fear nothing now," he said. "Our foes can  
steal

The burdens we lay down, but nothing more.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

All that we are we keep. They strike at  
shadows  
And cannot hurt us. Little as we may know,  
We have learned at least to know the abiding  
Power  
From these poor masks of clay. This dust,  
this flesh,  
All that we see and touch, are shadows of it,  
And hourly change and perish. Have we not  
seen  
Cities and nations, all that is built of earth,  
Fleeting into the darkness, like grey clouds,  
And only one thing constant—the great law,  
The eternal order of their march to death?  
Have we not seen it written upon the hills?  
The continents and seas do not endure.  
They change their borders. Where the seas  
are now  
Mountains will rise; and, where the land was,  
once,  
The dark Atlantic ends the world for man.  
But all these changes are not wrought by  
chance.  
They follow a great order. It may be

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

That all things are repeated and reborn;  
And, in their mighty periods, men return  
And pass through their forgotten lives anew.  
It may be; for, at times, the mind recalls—  
Or half recalls—the turning of a road,  
A statue on a hill, a passing face. . . .  
It may be; for our universe is bound  
In rhythm; and the setting star will rise.  
This many a cunning ballad-singer knows  
Who haunts the mind of man with dark  
refrains;  
Or those deep poets who foretell in verse  
The restoration of the world's great Year.  
Time never fails. Not Tanais, or the Nile  
Can flow for ever. They spring up and  
perish;  
But, after many changes, it may be  
These, too, return, with Egypt and her kings."

He paused a moment; then compassion, grief,  
Wonder and triumph, like one music, spoke  
Farewell to shadows, from his own deep soul  
Rapt, in pure vision, above the vanishing  
world:

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

“The torrents drag the rocks into the sea.  
The great sea smiles, and overflows the land.  
It hollows out the valleys and returns.  
The sea has washed the shining rocks away  
And cleft the headland with its golden fields  
That once bound Sicily to her mother’s  
breast.

Pharos, that was an island, far from shore  
When Homer sang, is wedded now and one  
With Egypt. The wild height where Sappho  
stood,

The beautiful, white, immortal promontory,  
Crowned with Apollo’s temple, long ago  
The struggling seas have severed from the  
land.

And those fair Grecian cities, Helice  
And Buris, wondering fishermen see, far  
down,

With snowy walls and columns all aslant,  
Trembling under the unremembering wave.  
The waters of Anigris, that were sweet  
As love, are bitter as death. There was a time  
When Etna did not burn. A time will come  
When it will cease to burn; for all things  
change;

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

And mightier things by far have changed  
than these

In the slow lapse of never-ending time.  
I have seen an anchor on the naked hills,  
And ocean-shells among the mountain-tops.  
Continents, oceans, all things pass away;  
But One, One only; for the Eternal Mind  
Enfolds all changes, and can never change."

### II. DEATH IN THE TEMPLE

NIGHT on Crotona, night without a star.  
I heard the mob, outside the Temple, roaring  
*Death to Pythagoras! Death to those who  
know!*

Before the flushed white columns, in the glare  
Of all those angry torches, Cylon stood  
Wickedly smiling. "They have barred the  
doors.

Pythagoras and his forty chosen souls  
Are all within. They are trapped, and they  
shall die.

It will be best to whet the people's rage

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Before we lay the axe, or set the torch  
Against the Muses' temple. One wild howl  
Of 'sacrilege' may defeat us."—This he called  
"Faith in the people."

He moistened his dry lips,  
And raised his hand. The savage clamouring  
ceased.

One breathless moment, ere he spoke, he  
paused,  
Gathering his thoughts. His thin white  
weasel face

Narrowed, his eyes contracted. In their pain  
—Pain pitiable, a torment of the mind—  
A bitter memory burned, of how he sued  
To join that golden brotherhood in vain.

For when the Master saw him, he discerned  
A spirit in darkness, violent, empty of  
thought,

But full of shallow vanity, cunning lies,  
Intense ambition.

All now was turned to hate;  
Hate the destroyer of men, the wrecker of  
cities,

The last disease of nations; hate, the fire

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

That eats away the heart; hate, the lean rat  
That gnaws the brain, till even reason glares  
Like madness through blind eyes; hate,  
    the thin snake  
That coils like whip-cord round the victim's  
    soul  
And strangles it; hate, that slides up through  
    his throat,  
And with its flat and quivering head usurps  
The function of his tongue,—to sting and  
    sting,  
Till all that poison which is now his life  
Is drained, and he lies dead; hate, that still  
    lives,  
And for the power to strike and sting again,  
May yet destroy this world.

So Cylon stood,  
Quivering a moment, in the fiery glare,  
Over the multitude.

Then, in his right hand,  
He shook a roll of parchment over his head,  
Crying, *The Master said it!*

At that word,  
A snarl, as of a myriad-throated beast,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Broke out again, and deepened into a roar—  
*Death to Pythagoras! Death to those who  
know!*

Cylon upheld his hand, as if to bless  
A stormy sea with calm. The howling died  
Into a deadly hush. With twisted lips  
He spoke.

“This is their Scroll, the Sacred Word,  
The Secret Doctrine of their Golden Order!  
Hear it!”

Then, interweaving truth with lies,  
Till even the truth struck like a venomous dart  
Into his hearers’ minds, he read aloud  
His cunningly chosen fragments.

At the end,  
He tore the scroll, and trampled it underfoot.  
“Ye have heard,” he said. “Ye are kin to all  
the beasts!

And, when ye die, your souls again inhabit  
Bodies of beasts, wild beasts, and beasts of  
burden.

Even yet more loathsome—he that will not  
starve

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

His flesh, and tame himself and all mankind  
To bear this golden yoke shall, after death,  
Dwell in the flesh of swine. He that rejects  
This wisdom shall, hereafter, seek the light  
Through endless years, with toads, asps,  
creeping things.

Thus would they exile all our happier gods!  
Away with Bacchus and his feasts of joy!  
Back, Aphrodite, to your shameful foam!  
Men must be tamed, like beasts.

The Master said it!  
And wherefore? There are certain lordly  
souls

Who rise above the beasts, and talk with gods.  
These are his Golden Brotherhood; these  
must rule!

Ye heard that verse from Homer—whom he  
loves—

Homer, the sycophant, who could call a  
prince

‘The shepherd of his people.’ What are ye,  
Even in this life, then, but their bleating  
flocks?

*The Master said it!*

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Homer—his demi-god,  
Ye know his kind; ye know whence Homer  
sprang;  
An old blind beggarman, singing for his food,  
Through every city in Greece”—(This Cylon  
called  
Honouring the people)—“already he is out-  
worn,  
Forgotten, without a word for this young age;  
And great Pythagoras crowns him!

When they choose  
Their Golden Brotherhood, they lay down  
their laws,  
Declaring none may rule until he learn,  
Prostrate himself in reverence to the dead,  
And pass, through golden discipline, to power  
Over himself and you; but—mark this well—  
Under Pythagoras! Discipline! Ah, that  
path  
Is narrow and difficult. Only three hundred  
souls,  
Aristocrats of knowledge, have attained  
This glory. It is against the people’s will  
To know, or to acknowledge those that know,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Or let their knowledge lead them for one hour.

For see—see how the gods have driven them mad,

Even in their knowledge! In their own Sacred Scroll,

Pythagoras, who derives you from the beasts,  
Affirms that earth, this earth beneath our feet,  
Spins like a little planet round the sun!"

A brutal bellowing, as of Asian bulls,  
Boomed from a thousand mouths. (This Cylon called

The laughter of the people and their gods.)  
He raised his hand. It ceased.

"*This* is their knowledge,  
And *this*," he cried, "their charter to obscure  
What all men know, the natural face of things.

*This* proves their right to rule us from above.  
They meet here nightly. Nightly they conspire

Against your rights, your liberties, and mine.  
Was it not they who, when the people rose

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

In Sybaris, housed her noble fugitives here?  
And was it not Pythagoras who refused  
To send them back to Sybaris and their  
death?

Was it not this that plunged us into war  
With Sybaris; and, when victory crowned our  
arms,

Who but Pythagoras robbed us of its fruits?  
We gathered booty, and he called it theft.  
We burned their palaces, and he called it hate.  
We avenged our sons. He called it butchery,  
And said the wild beast wakes again in  
man.

What have we gained, then? Nothing but the  
pride

Of saving those Pythagoras wished to save;  
Counting gold dross, and serving his pure  
gods.

*The Master said it.* What is your judgment,  
then?"

He stretched one hand, appealing to the  
crowd,

And one to the white still Temple.

"*Death! Death! Death!"*

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Under the flaring torches, the long waves  
Of tense hot faces opened a thousand mouths,  
Little blue pits of shadow that raced along  
them,

And shook the red smoke with one volleying  
roar,—

*Death to Pythagoras! Death to those who  
know!*

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

But, in the Temple, through those massive  
walls,

While Cylon spoke, no whisper had been  
heard;

Only, at times, a murmur, when he paused,  
As of a ninth wave breaking, far away.

The half-moon of the Muses, crowned with  
calm,

Towered through the dimness. Under their  
giant knees,

In their immortal shadow, those who knew  
How little was their knowledge waited death  
Proudly, around their Master. Robed in  
white,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Beautiful as Apollo in old age,  
He stood amongst them, laying a gentle hand,  
One last caress, upon that dearest head  
Bowed there before him, his own daughter's  
hair.

Then, tenderly, the god within him moved  
His mortal lips; and, in the darkness there,  
He spoke, as though the music of the spheres  
Welled from his heart, to ease the hurts of  
death.

“Not tears, beloved. Give it welcome, rather!  
Soon, though they spared us, this blind flesh  
would fail.

They are saving us the weary mile or two  
That end a dusty journey. The dull stains  
Of travel; the soiled vesture; the sick heart  
That hoped at every turning of the road  
To see the Perfect City, and hoped in vain,  
Shall grieve us now no more. Now, at the  
last,

After a stern novitiate, iron test,  
And grinding failures, the great light draws  
near,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

And we shall pass together, through the Veil."

He bowed his head. It was their hour of prayer;

And, from among the Muses in the dark,  
A woman's voice, a voice in ecstasy,  
As if a wound should bless the sword that made it,

Breathed through the night the music of their law:

*Close not thine eyes in sleep  
Till thou hast searched thy memories of the day,*

*Graved in thy heart the vow thou didst not keep,  
And called each wandering thought back to the way.*

*Pray to the gods! Their aid,  
Their aid alone can crown thy work aright;  
Teach thee that song whereof all worlds were made;  
Rend the last veil, and feed thine eyes with light.*

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

*Naught shall deceive thee, then.  
All creatures of the sea and earth and air,  
The circling stars, the warring tribes of  
men  
Shall make one harmony, and thy soul shall  
hear.*

*Out of this prison of clay  
With lifted face, a mask of struggling fire,  
With arms of flesh and bone stretched up  
to pray,  
Dumb, thou shalt hear that Voice of thy  
desire.*

*Thou that wast brought so low;  
And through those lower lives hast risen  
again,  
Kin to the beasts, with power at last to  
know  
Thine own proud banishment and diviner  
pain;*

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

*Courage, O conquering soul!  
For all the boundless night that whelms thee  
now,  
Though worlds on worlds into that dark-  
ness roll,  
The gods abide; and of their race art thou!*

There was a thunder of axes at the doors;  
A glare as of a furnace; and the cry,  
*Death to Pythagoras! Death to those who  
know!*

Then, over the streaming smoke and the wild  
light  
That like a stormy sunset sank away  
Into a darker night, the deeper mist  
Rolled down, and of that death I knew no  
more.

## II

### ARISTOTLE

#### I. YOUTH AND THE SEA

THE mists unfolded on a sparkling coast  
Washed by a violet sea.

It was no dream.  
The clustering irised bubbles in the foam,  
The grinding stir as through the shining  
pebbles  
The wave ran back; the little drifts of smoke  
Where wet black rocks dried grey in the hot  
sun;  
The pods of sea-weed, crackling underfoot,  
All told me this.

My comrade at my side,  
Moved like a shadow. I turned a promon-  
tory,  
And like a memory of my own lost youth,  
Shining and far, across the gulf I saw

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Stagira, like a little city of snow,  
Under the Thracian hills.

Nothing had changed.  
I saw the City where that Greek was born  
Who ranged all art, all life, and lit a fire  
That shines yet, after twice a thousand years;  
And strange, but strange as truth, it was to  
hear  
No slightest change in that old rhythmic  
sound  
Of waves against the shore.

Then, at my side,  
My soul's companion whispered, all unseen,  
'Two thousand years have hidden him from  
the world,  
Robed him in grey and bearded him with eld,  
Untrue to his warm life. There was a time  
When he was young as truth is; and the sun  
Browned his young body, danced in his young  
grey eyes;  
And look—the time is now.'

There, as he spoke,  
I saw among the rocks on my right hand,  
Lying, face downward, over a deep rock-pool,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

A youth, so still that, till a herring-gull  
swooped  
And sheered away from him with a startled  
cry  
And a wild flutter of its brown mottled  
wings,  
I had not seen him.

Quietly we drew near,  
As shadows may, unseen.

He pored intent  
Upon a sea-anemone, like a flower  
Opening its disk of blue and crimson rays  
Under the lucid water.

He stretched his hand,  
And with a sea-gull's feather, touched its  
heart.  
The bright disk shrank, and closed, as though  
a flower  
Turned instantly to fruit, ripe, soft, and  
round  
As the pursed lips of a sea-god hiding there.  
They fastened, sucking, on the quill and  
held it.  
Young Aristotle laughed. He rose to his feet.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

“Come and see this!” he called.

Under the cliff  
Nicomachus arose, and drawing his robe  
More closely round him, crossed the slippery  
rocks  
To join his son.

There, side by side, they crouched  
Over the limpid pool,—the grey physician  
And eager boy.

“See, how it grips the feather!  
And grips the rock, too. Yet it has no roots.  
Your sea-flowers turn to animals with mouths.  
Take out the quill. Now it turns back again  
Into a flower; look—look—what lovely  
colours,  
What marvellous artistry.

This never was formed  
By chance. It has an aim beyond this pool.  
What does it mean? This unity of design?  
This delicate scale of life that seems to ascend  
Without a break, through all the forms of  
earth  
From plants to men? The sea-sponge that I  
found

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Grew like a blind rock-rooted clump of moss  
Dilating in water, shrinking in the sun;  
I know it for a strange sea-animal now,  
Shaped like the brain of a man. Can it be true  
That, as the poets fable in their songs  
Of Aphrodite, life itself was born  
Here, in the sea?"

Nicomachus looked at him.  
"That's a dark riddle, my son. You will not  
hear  
An answer in the groves of Academe,  
Not even from Plato. When you go to  
Athens  
Next year, remember, among the loftiest  
flights  
Of their philosophy, that the living truth  
Is here on earth if we could only see it.  
This, this at least, all true Asclepiads know.  
Remember, always, in that battle of words,  
The truth that father handed down to son  
Through the long line of men that served their  
kind  
From Æsculapius, father of us all,  
To you his own descendant:—naught avails

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

In science, till the light you seize from heaven  
Shines through the clear sharp fact beneath  
your feet.

This is the test of both—that, in their wed-  
ding,

The light that was a disembodied dream  
Burns through the fact, and makes a lanthorn  
of it,

Transfigures it, confirms it, gives it new  
And deeper meanings; and itself, in turn,  
Is thereby seen more truly.

Use your eyes;

And you, or those that follow you, will  
outsoar

Pythagoras.

He believed the soul descends  
From the pure realm of gods; is clothed with  
clay;

And, struggling upward through a myriad  
forms,

After a myriad lives and deaths, returns  
Enriched with all those memories, lord of all  
That knowledge, master of all those griefs  
and pains

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

As else it could not be, home to the gods,  
Itself a god, prepared for the full bliss,  
The living consummation of the whole.  
Earth must be old, if all these things are  
true.

But take this tale and read it. If it seem  
Only a tale, the light in it has turned  
Dark facts to lanthorns for me. There are  
tales

More true than any fragment of the truth.

One of his homeless clan (who came to  
me

Dying), his last disciple's wandering son,  
Gave me the scroll. I give it now to you,—  
The young swift-footed runner with the  
fire.

You'll find strange thoughts; and, woven into  
the close,

His Golden Verses, with a thought more  
strange.

Then, from his breast, the Asclepiad drew a  
scroll,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Smooth as old ivory, honey-stained by time,  
A wand of whispering magic; and the boy  
Seized it with brown young hands.

His father smiled

And turned away, between the shining pools  
To seek Stagira. Under his sandalled feet  
The sea-weeds crackled. His footsteps  
crunched away  
Along the beach.

Upon a sun-warmed rock  
The boy outspread the curled papyrus-roll,  
Keeping each corner in place with a small  
grey stone.

There, while the white robe drifting down the  
coast  
Grew smaller and smaller, till at last it  
seemed  
A flake of vanishing foam, he lay full length,  
Reading the tale.

The salt on his brown skin  
Dried to a faint white powder in the sun.  
Over him, growing bold, the peering gulls  
Wheeled closer, as he lay there, tranced and  
still;

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Till, through the tale, the golden verses  
breathed  
Like a returning music, rhythmic tones  
Changed by new voices, coloured by new  
minds,  
Yet speaking still for one time-conquering  
soul,  
As on the shore the wandering ripples  
changed  
And tossed new spray-drops into the sparkling  
air,  
Yet pulsed with the ancient breathing of the  
sea:

*Guard the immortal fire.  
Honour the glorious line of the great dead.  
To the new height let all thy soul aspire;  
But let those memories be thy wine and bread.*

*Quench not in any shrine  
The smouldering storax. In no human heart  
Quench what love kindled. Faintly though  
it shine,  
Not till it wholly dies the gods depart.*

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

*Truth has remembering eyes.  
The wind-blown throng will clamour at  
Falsehood's gate.  
Has Falsehood triumphed? Let the world  
despise  
Thy constant mind. Stand thou aside, and  
wait.*

*Write not thy thoughts on snow.  
Grave them in rock to front the thundering  
sky.  
From Time's proud feast, when it is time  
to go,  
Take the dark road; bid one more world  
good-bye.*

*The lie may steal an hour.  
The truth has living roots, and they strike  
deep.  
A moment's glory kills the rootless flower,  
While the true stem is gathering strength in  
sleep.*

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

*Out of this earth, this dust,  
Out of this flesh, this blood, this living tomb;  
Out of these cosmic throes of wrath and  
lust,  
Breaks the lost splendour from the world's  
blind womb.*

*Courage, O conquering soul!  
For all the boundless night that whelms thee  
now,  
Though suns and stars into oblivion roll,  
The gods abide, and of their race art thou.*

### II. THE EXILE

TIME dwindled to a shadow. The grey  
mist,  
Wreathed with old legends, drifted slowly  
away  
From the clear hill-top, where the invisible  
wings  
Had brought me through the years.

It was no dream.

Clearly, as in a picture, at my feet,



## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Among dark groves, the columned temples  
gleamed,  
And I saw Athens, in the sunset, dying.

Dying; for though her shrines had not yet  
lost

One radiant grain of what lies crumbling now  
Like a god's bones upon the naked hills;  
Though the whole city wound through gate  
on gate

Of visionary splendour to one height  
Where, throned above this world, the  
Parthenon

Smiled at the thought of Time, her violet  
crown

Was woven of shadows from a darker realm,  
And I saw Athens, dying.

From that hill—

The hill of Lycabettus—on our right  
Eridanus flowed, Ilissus on the left,  
Girdling the City like two coils of fire.  
Then, as a spirit sees, I saw, unseen,  
One standing near me on the bare hillside,  
Still as a statue, gazing to the west;

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

So still that, till his lengthening shadow crept  
Up to my feet, the wonder of the City  
Withheld my gaze from something more  
august  
In that one lonely presence.

Earth and sun,  
On their great way, revealed him, with the  
touch  
Of his long stealing shadow; yet it seemed  
The power that cast it was no mortal power.  
He towered against the dying gleams below  
Like Truth in exile.

On him, too, at last  
The doom had fallen. Clasping his grey robe  
More closely round him, Aristotle looked  
Long, long, at his proud City. She had lost  
More glories in that sunset than she knew;  
For, though the sun went down in kingly gold  
To westward, on that darkening eastern hill,  
The bearer of a more celestial fire  
Now looked his last on Athens.

Changed, how changed,  
Was this grey form from that immortal  
youth

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Who read the Golden Verses by the sea.  
His brow was furrowed now; and, on his face,  
Life, with her sharp-edged tools of joy and  
    pain,  
Had deeply engraved a legend of her own.

There, as his lengthening shadow had drawn  
    my gaze,  
He seemed himself a shadow of vaster things,  
A still dark portent of those moving worlds  
Whose huge events, unseen and far away,  
Had led him thither; and, as he once had  
    shaped  
Their course, now shaped his destiny and  
    doom.

He had ranged all art, all science. He had  
    shaped  
Kingdoms and kings, by virtue of his part  
In the one all-shaping Mind. Had he not  
    lived,  
The world that never knows its noblest  
    powers  
Had moved, with half mankind, another way.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

There, looking backward, through his life, he  
knew  
That, though the gods conceal their ways  
from men,  
Yet in their great conjunctures there are  
gleams  
That show them at their work. Theirs was  
the word,  
Twenty years back, when Philip of Macedon  
Summoned him, as the uncrowned king of  
thought,  
To teach his eaglet how to use his wings.  
For, by that thought, and by the disciplined  
power,  
The sovran power of judgment, swift to seize  
Causes, effects, and laws, and wield the blind  
Unreasoning mass, he had wellnigh brought  
to birth  
What Plato saw in vision—a State enthroned  
Above the flux of time, Hellas at one,  
A harmony of cities, each a chord  
In an immortal song of Beauty and Truth,  
Freedom and Law. His was the moving  
power,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Not wholly aware, that strove to an end unseen;

And in that power had Alexander reigned.

Autocrator of the Greek hegemony,

He had rolled all Asia back into the night.

Satraps of Persia, the proud kings of Tyre,

Nineveh, Babylon, Egypt, all bowed down;

And Alexander shaped the conquered world,

But Aristotle shaped the conqueror's mind.

He had shaped that mind to ends not all its own.

His was the well-thumbed *Odyssey* that reposed

Under the conqueror's pillow; his the love,

Fragrant with memories of the hills and sea,

That had rebuilt Stagira; his the voice

In the night-watches; his the harnessed thoughts

That, like immortal sentries, mounted guard  
In the dark gates of that world-quelling mind.

His was the whisper, the dark vanishing hint,  
The clue to the riddle of slowly emerging life

That, imaged in Egyptian granite, rose

Before the silent conqueror when he stared

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

At that strange shape, half human and half  
brute,  
The Sphinx, who knew the secret of the  
world  
And smiled at him, and all his victories,  
Under the desert stars, while the deep night  
Silently deepened round him.

Far away,  
In Athens, towered the bearer of the fire.  
His was the secret harmony of law  
That, while the squadrons wheeled in ordered  
ranks, . . .  
Each finding its full life only in the whole,  
Flashed light upon the cosmos; his the quest  
That taught the conqueror how to honour  
truth  
And led him, while he watered his proud  
steeds  
In all the streams from Danube to the Nile,  
To send another army through the wilds,  
Ten thousand huntsmen, ranging hills and  
woods  
At Aristotle's hest, for birds and beasts;  
So that the master-intellect might lay hold

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Upon the ladder of life that mounts through  
Time,

From plants to beasts, and up, through man,  
to God.

So all the might of Macedon had been turned  
To serve the truth, and to complete his work  
At Athens, for the conquering age to come;  
When Athens, like the very City of Truth,  
Might shine upon all nations, and might  
wear,

On her clear brows, his glory as her own.

Then came a flying rumour through the night.  
Earth's overlord, the autocrator, his friend,  
Alexander the Great had fallen in Babylon.  
A little cup of poison, subtle drops  
Of Lethe—in a cup of delicate gold,—  
And the world's victor slept, an iron sleep;  
The conqueror, stricken in his conquered city,  
Cold, in the purple of Babylon, lay dead:  
And the slow tread of his armies as they  
passed,  
Soldier by soldier, through that chamber of  
death,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

To look their last upon his marble face,  
Pulsed like a muffled drum across the world.  
Had Aristotle's cunning mixed the draught  
That murdered tyranny? Let that whispered  
    lie

Estrange the heart of Macedon.

    There, in Athens,  
It was enough, now that his friend lay dead,  
To know that, as the body is rent away  
From the immortal soul, his greatness now  
Had lost its earthly stay. His mighty mind  
Walked like a ghost in Athens. It was enough  
To hint that he had taught his king too well;  
Served him too well; and played the spy for  
    him;

While, for main charge, since he had greatly  
    loved

The mother who had borne him, since he had  
    poured

His love out on her tomb, it would suffice  
To snarl that rites like these were meant for  
    gods

And that this man who had seen behind the  
    world

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

The Mover of all things, the eternal God,  
The supreme Good, by these fond rites of  
love,  
Too simple and too great, too clear, too deep,  
Had robbed the little sophists of their dues  
And so blasphemed against their gods of clay.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

Hurrying footsteps neared. He turned and  
saw

His young adopted son and Tyrtamus.  
“Nicanor! Theophrastus!—nay, lift up  
Your heads. You cannot bring me bitterer  
news

Than I foresaw. I must be brought to judg-  
ment.

But on what grounds?”—

“Dear father of us all—”

The youth, Nicanor, answered, “When the  
crowd

Grins in the very face of those who ask,  
Or think, or dream that truth should be their  
guide;

Nay, grins at truth itself, as at a fool  
Tricked in his grandsire’s rags, a rustic oaf,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

A blundering country simpleton who gapes  
At the great city's reeling dance of lies,  
How can the grounds be wanting?"

"The true grounds,"

His 'Theophrastus' muttered, "we know too well.

Eurymedon, and the rest, those gnat-like  
clans,

The sophists' buzzing swarms, desire a  
change.

They hold with Heraclitus—all things  
change."

His irony stung the youth. His grey eyes  
gleamed.

His voice grew harsh with anger. "Ay, all  
things change!

So justice and injustice, right and wrong,  
Evil and good, must wear each other's cloaks;  
And, in that chaos, when all excellence  
And honour are plucked down, and the clear  
truth

Trampled into the dirt, themselves may rise.  
Athens is dying."

"They speak truly enough  
[70]

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Of all that they can know," the Master said.  
"Change is the rhythm that draws this world  
along.

They see the change. Its law they cannot  
see.

But man who is mortal in this body of earth  
Has also a part, by virtue of his reason,  
In an enduring realm. Their prophet knew  
And heard what sophists have no souls to  
hear,—

The Harmony that includes the pulse of  
change;

The divine Reason, past the flux of things;  
The eternal Logos, ordering the whole  
world."

And, as he spoke, I heard, through his own  
words,

Tones that were now a part of his own mind,  
The murmur of that old legend which he read  
So long ago, in boyhood, by the sea.

*Time never fails. Not Tanais or the Nile  
Can flow for ever. All things pass away  
But One, One only; for the eternal Mind  
Enfolds all changes, and can never change.*

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Tyrtamus touched his arm. "Time presses now.

Come with us. All is ready. On the coast, In a lonely creek, the quiet keel is rocking. Three trusty sailors wait us, and at dawn We, too, shall find new life in a new world With all that could endure. The voyager knows

The blindness of the cities. Each believes Its narrow wall the boundary of the world; And when he puts to sea, their buzzing cries Fade out behind him like a wrangle of bees."—

"If I remain, what then?"—

The hill-top shone In the last rays. Athens was growing dark. Tyrtamus answered him. "A colder cup Of hemlock, and the fate of Socrates."

The Master looked at Athens. Far away He traced the glimmering aisle of olive-trees

Where, for so long, with many a youthful friend

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

He had walked, and taught, and striven himself to learn.

Southward, below the Acropolis, he could see  
The shadowy precincts of the Asclepiads,  
Guarding their sacred spring, the natural  
fount,

Loved for his father's memory.

Close beside,

The Dionysiac theatre, like a moon  
Hewn from the marble of Hymettus,  
gleamed,

A silvery crescent, dying into a cloud.

There, though the shade of Sophocles had  
fled,

Long since, he heard even now in his deep  
soul

The stately chorus on a ghostly stage  
Chanting the praise of thought that builds the  
city,

Hoists the strong sail to cross the hoary sea,  
Ploughs the unwearied earth, yokes the wild  
steed

And the untamed mountain-bull; thought that  
contrives

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Devices that can cure all ills but death:

*Of all strong things none is more strong than man;*  
*Man that has learned to shield himself from cold*  
*And the sharp rain; and turns his marvellous arts*  
*Awhile to evil; and yet again, to good;*  
*Man that is made all-glorious with his city*  
*When he obeys the inviolable laws*  
*Of earth and heaven; but when, in subtle pride,*  
*He makes a friend of wrong, is driven astray*  
*And broken apart, like dust before the wind.*

All now, except the heights, had died away  
Into the dark. Only the Parthenon raised  
A brow like drifted snow against the west.  
He watched it, melting into the flood of night  
With all those memories.

Then he turned and said,  
“If in a moment’s thoughtless greed I grasped  
The prize that Athens offers me to-night,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

She is not so rich but this might make her  
poor.

Death wears a gentle smile when we grow  
old;

And I could welcome it. But she shall not  
stain

Her hands a second time. Let Athens know  
That Aristotle left her, not to save  
His last few lingering days of life on earth  
But to save Athens.

I have truly loved her,

Next to the sea-washed town where I was  
born,

Best of all cities built by men on earth.

But there's another Athens, pure and white,  
Where Plato walks, a City invisible,  
Whereof this Athens is only a dim shadow;  
And I shall not be exiled from that City."

The hilltop darkened. The blind mist rolled  
down;

The voices died. I saw and heard no more.



### III—MOVING EASTWARD

#### I

##### FARABI AND AVICENNA

**G**REY mists enfolded Europe; and I  
heard  
Sounds of bewildered warfare in the gloom.

Yet, like a misty star, one lampad moved  
Eastward, beyond the mountains where of old  
Prometheus, in whose hand the fire first shone,  
Was chained in agony. His undying ghost  
Beheld the fire returning on its course  
Unquenched, and smiled from his dark crag  
in peace,  
Implacable peace, at heaven.

Eastward, the fire  
Followed the road Pythagoras trod, to meet  
The great new morning.

The grey mists dissolved.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

*And was it I—or Shadow-of-a-Leaf—that  
saw*

*And heard, and lived through all he showed  
me then?*

I saw a desert blazing in the sun,  
Tufts of tall palm; and then—that City of  
dreams.

As though an age went past me in an hour  
I saw the silken Khalifs and their court  
Flowing like orient clouds along the streets  
Of Bagdad. In great Mahmoun's train I  
saw

Nazzam, who from the Stagirite caught his  
fire.

Long had he pondered on the Eternal Power  
Who, in the dark palm of His timeless hand  
Rolls the whole cosmos like one gleaming  
pearl.

Had he not made, in one pure timeless  
thought,

All things at once, the last things with the  
first,

The first life with the last; so that mankind,

# THE BOOK OF EARTH

Through all its generations, co-exists  
For His eternal eyes? Yet, from our own  
Who in the time-sphere move, the Maker  
hides

The full revolving glory, and unfolds  
The glimmering miracles of its loveliness  
Each at its destined moment, one by one,  
In an æonian pageant that returns  
For ever to the night whence it began.

Thus Nazzam bowed before the inscrutable  
Power,  
Yet found Him in his own time-conquering  
soul.

I saw the hundred scribes of El Mansour  
Making their radiant versions from the  
Greek.

I saw Farabi, moving through the throng  
Like a gaunt chieftain. His world-ranging  
eyes

Beheld the Cause of causes.

In his mind,

Lucid and deep, the reasoning of the Greeks  
Flooded the world with new celestial light,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Golden interpretations that made clear  
To mighty shades the thing they strove to say.

He carried on their fire, with five-score books  
In Arabic, where the thoughts of Athens,  
    fledged

With orient colours, towered to the pure  
    realm:

Of Plato; but, returning earthward still,  
Would wheel around his Aristotle's mind  
Like doves around the cote where they were  
    born.

Then the dark mists that round the vision  
    flowed

Like incense-clouds, dividing scene from  
    scene,

Rolled back from a wide prospect, and I saw,  
As one that mounts upon an eagle's wing,  
A savage range of mountains, peaked with  
    snow,

To northward.

They glowed faintly, for the day  
Was ending, and the shadows of the rocks  
Were stretched out to the very feet of night.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Yet, far away, to southward, I could see  
The swollen Oxus, like a vanishing snake  
That slid away in slippery streaks and gleams  
Through his grey reed-beds to the setting sun.  
Earthward we moved; and, in the tawny  
plain,

Before me, like a lanthorn of dark fire  
Bokhara shone, a city of shadowy towers  
Crimsoned with sunset. In its turreted walls  
I saw eleven gates, and all were closed  
Against the onrushing night.

Then, at my side,  
My soul's companion whispered, "You shall  
see

The Gates of Knowledge opening here anew.  
Here Avicenna dwelt in his first youth."

At once, as on the very wings of night,  
We entered. In the rustling musky gloom  
Of those hot streets, thousands of falcon eyes  
Were round us; but our shadows passed un-  
seen

Into the glimmering palace of the Prince  
Whom Avicenna, when all others failed,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Restored to life, and claimed for all reward  
Freedom to use the Sultan's library,  
The pride of El Mansour; a wasted joy  
To the new Sultan. Radiances were there  
Imprisoned like the innumerable slaves  
Of one too wealthy even to know their names;  
Beautiful Grecian captives, bought with gold  
From tawny traffickers in the Ionian sea.  
A shadow, with a shadow at my side,  
I saw him reading there, intent and still,  
Under a silver lamp; his dusky brow  
Wreathed with white silk, a goblet close at  
hand  
Brimmed with a subtle wine that could un-  
cloud  
The closing eyes of Sleep.

Along each wall  
Great carven chests of fragrant cedar-wood  
Released the imprisoned magic,—radiant  
scrolls,  
Inscribed with wisdom's earliest wonder-cry;  
Dark lore; the secrets of the Asclepiads;  
History wild as legend; legends true  
As history, all being shadows of one light;

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Philosophies of earth and heaven ; and rhymes  
That murmured still of their celestial springs.  
He thrust his book aside, as in despair.  
Our shadows followed him through the  
swarming streets  
Into the glimmering mosque. I saw him  
bowed  
Prostrate in prayer for light, light on a page  
Of subtle-minded Greek which many a day  
Had baffled him, when he sought therein the  
mind  
Of his forerunner.

I saw him as he rose ;  
And, as by chance, at the outer gates he  
met  
A wandering vendor of old tattered books  
Who, for three dirhems, offered him a prize.  
He bought it, out of gentle heart, and found  
A wonder on every page,—Farabi's work,  
Flooding his Greek with light.

He could not see  
What intricate law had swept it into his hand ;  
But, having more than knowledge, he re-  
turned

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Through the dark gates of prayer ; and, pouring out  
His alms upon the poor, lifted his heart  
In silent thanks to God.

## II

### AVICENNA'S DREAM

BUT all these books—for him—were living thoughts,

Clues to the darker Book of Nature's law;  
For, when he climbed, a goat-foot boy, in Spring

Up through the savage Hissar range, he saw  
A hundred gorges thundering at his feet  
With snow-fed cataracts; torrents whose  
fierce flight

Uprooted forests, tore great boulders down,  
Ground the huge rocks together; and every  
year

Channelled raw gullies and swept old scars  
away;

So that the wildered eagle beating up  
To seek his last year's eyry, found that all  
Was new and strange; and even the tuft of  
pines

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

That used to guide him to his last year's nest  
Had vanished from the crags he knew no  
more.

There, pondering on the changes of the world,  
Young Avicenna, with a kinglier eye,  
Saw in the lapse of ages the great hills  
Melting away like waves; and, from the sea,  
New lands arising; and the whole dark earth  
Dissolving, and reshaping all its realms  
Around him, like a dream.

Thus of his hills  
And of their high snows flowing through his  
thoughts  
Was born the tale that afterwards was told  
By golden-tongued Kazwini, and wafted  
thence  
Through many lands, from Tartary to Pa-  
meer.  
For, cross-legged, in the shadow of a palm,  
The hawk-eyed teller of tales, in years un-  
born  
Holding his wild clan spell-bound, would in-  
tone

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

The deep melodious legend, flowing thus,  
As all the world flows, through the eternal  
mind.

I came one day upon an ancient City.  
I saw the long white crescent of its wall  
Stained with thin peach-blood, blistered by  
the sun.

I saw beyond it, clustering in the sky,  
Ethereal throngs of ivory minarets,  
Tall slender towers, each crowned with one  
bright pearl.

It was no desert phantom; for it grew  
And sharpened as I neared it, till I saw,  
Under the slim carved windows in the towers,  
The clean-cut shadows, forked and black and  
small  
Like clinging swallows.

In the midst up-swam  
The Sultan's palace with its faint blue domes,  
The moons of morning.

Wreaths of frankincense  
[87]

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Floated around me as I entered in.  
A thousand thousand warrior faces thronged  
The glimmering streets. Blood-rubies burned  
    like stars  
In shadowy silks and turbans of all hues.

The markets glowed with costly merchandise.  
I saw proud stallions, pacing to and fro  
Before the rulers of a hundred kings.  
I saw, unrolled beneath the slender feet  
Of slave-girls, white as April's breathing  
    snow,  
Soft prayer-rugs of a subtler drift of bloom  
Than flows with sunset over the blue and grey  
And opal of the drifting desert sand.

Princes and thieves, philosophers and fools  
Jostled together, among hot scents of musk.  
Dark eyes were flashing. Blood throbbed  
    darker yet.  
Lean dusky fingers groped for hilts of jade.  
Then, with a roll of drums, through Eastern  
    gates,  
Out of the dawn, and softer than its clouds,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Tall camels, long tumultuous caravans,  
Like stately ships came slowly stepping in,  
Loaded with shining plunder from Cathay.  
I turned and asked my neighbour in the  
throng

Who built that city, and how long ago.  
He stared at me in wonder. "It is old,  
Older than any memory," he replied.  
"Nor can our fathers' oldest legend tell  
Who built so great a city."

I went my way.  
And in a thousand ages I returned,  
And found not even a stone of that great City,  
Not even a shadow of all that lust and pride.  
But only an old peasant gathering herbs  
Where once it stood, upon the naked plain.

"What wars destroyed it, and how long ago?"  
I asked him. Slowly lifting his grey head,  
He stared at me in wonder.

"This bleak land  
Was always thus. Our bread was always  
black

And our wine harsh. It is a bitter wind

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

That scourges us. But where these nettles  
grew  
Nettles have always grown. Nothing has  
changed  
In mortal memory here."

"Was there not, once,  
A mighty City?" I said, "with shining streets,  
Here, on this ground?" I spoke with bated  
breath.

He shook his head and smiled, the pitying  
smile

That wise men use to poets and to fools.—  
"Our fathers never told us of that City.  
Doubtless it was a dream."

I went my way.

And in a thousand ages I returned;  
And, where the plain was, I beheld the  
sea.

The sea-gulls mewed and pounced upon their  
prey.

The brown-legged fishermen crouched upon  
the shore,  
Mending their tarry nets.

I asked how long

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

That country had been drowned beneath the waves.

They mocked at me. "His wits are drowned in wine.

Tides ebb and flow, and fishes leap ashore;  
But all our harvest, since the first wind blew,  
Swam in deep waters. Are not wrecks washed up

With coins that none can use, because they bear

The blind old images of forgotten kings?

The waves have shaped these cliffs, dug out these caves,

Rounded each agate on this battered beach.

How long? Ask earth, ask heaven. Nothing has changed.

The sea was always here."—

I went my way.

And in a thousand ages I returned.

The sea had vanished. Where the ships had sailed

Warm vineyards basked, among the enfolding hills.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

I saw, below me, on the winding road,  
Two milk-white oxen, under a wooden yoke,  
Drawing a waggon, loaded black with grapes.  
Beside them walked a slim brown-ankled girl.  
I stood beneath a shadowy wayside oak  
To watch them. They drew near.

It was no dream.

Blood of the grape upon the wrinkled throats  
And smoking flanks of the oxen told me this.  
I saw the branching veins and satin skin  
Twitch at the flickering touch of a fly. I saw  
The knobs of brass that sheathed their curling  
horns,

The moist black muzzles.

Like many whose coats are white,  
Their big dark eyes had mists of blue.

Their breath  
Was meadows newly mown.

By all the gods  
That ever wrung man's heart out in the grave  
I did not dream this life into the world.—  
Blood of the grape upon the girl's brown arms  
And lean, young, bird-like fingers told me  
this.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Her smooth feet powdered by the warm grey  
dust;

The grape-stalk that she held in her white  
teeth;

Her mouth a redder rose than Omar knew;

Her eyes, dark pools where stars could shine  
by day;

These were no dream. And yet,—

“How long ago,”

I asked her, “did the bitter sea withdraw  
Its foam from all your happy sun-burnt  
hills?”

She looked at me in fear. Then, with a smile,  
She answered, “Nothing here has ever  
changed.

My father’s father, in his childhood, played  
Among these vines. That oak-tree where you  
stand

Had lived a century, then. The parent oak  
From which its acorn dropped had long been  
dead.

But hills are hills. I never saw the sea.

Nothing has ever changed.”

I went my way.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Last, in a thousand ages I returned,  
And found, once more, a City, thronged and tall,  
More rich, more marvellous even than the first;  
A City of pride and lust and gold and grime,  
A City of clustering domes and stately towers,  
And temples where the great new gods might dwell.  
But, turning to a citizen in the gates,  
I asked who built it and how long ago.  
He stared at me as wise men stare at fools;  
Then, pitying the afflicted, he replied  
Gently, as to a child:

“The City is old,  
Older than all our histories. Its birth  
Is lost among the impenetrable mists  
That shroud the most remote antiquity.  
None knows, nor can our oldest legends tell  
Who built so great a City.”

I went my way.

## IV—THE TORCH IN ITALY

LEONARDO DA VINCI

### I

#### HILLS AND THE SEA

THE mists rolled back. I saw the City  
of Flowers

Far down, upon the plain; and, on the slope  
Beside us—we were shadows and unseen,—  
Giulio, the painter, sketching rocks and trees.  
We watched him working, till a pine-cone  
crackled

On the dark ridge beyond us, and we saw,  
Descending from the summits like a god,  
A deep-eyed stranger with a rose-red cloak  
Fluttering against the blue of the distant hills.

He stood awhile, above a raw ravine,  
Studying the furrows that the rains had made

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Last winter. Then he searched among the  
rocks  
As though for buried gold.

As he drew near  
Giulio looked up and spoke, and he replied.  
Their voices rose upon the mountain air  
Like a deep river answering a brook,  
While each pursued his work in his own way.

*Giulio.*

What are you seeking? Something you have  
lost?

*The Stranger.*

Something I hope to find.

*Giulio.*

You dropped it here?  
Was it of value? Not your purse, I hope.

*The Stranger.*

More precious than my purse.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

*Giulio.*

Your lady's ring?  
A jewel, perhaps?

*The Stranger.*

A jewel of a sort;  
But it may take a thousand years to trace it  
Back to its rightful owner.

*Giulio (laughing).*

O, you are bitten  
By the prevailing fashion. Since the plough  
Upturned those broken statues, all the world  
Is relic-hunting; but, my friend, you'll find  
No Aphrodite here.

*The Stranger (picking up a fossil).*

And yet I think  
It was the sea, from which she rose alive,  
That shaped these rocks and left these twisted  
shells

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Locked up, like stone in stone. They must  
have lived  
Once, in the sea.

### *Giulio.*

Ah, now I understand.  
You're a philosopher,—one of those who  
tread  
The dusty road to Nowhere, which they  
call  
Science.

### *The Stranger.*

All roads to truth are one to me.

### *Giulio.*

Sir, you deceive yourself. Your road can lead  
Only to error. The Adriatic lies  
How many miles away? We stand up here  
On these unchanging hills; and yet, to fit  
Your theory, you would roll the seas above  
The peaks of Monte Rosa.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

*The Stranger.*

But these shells?

How did they come here?

*Giulio.*

Obviously enough,  
The sea being where it is, it was the Flood  
That left them here.

*The Stranger.*

Then Noah must have dropped them  
Out of his Ark. They never crept so far;  
And Noah must have dumped his ballast, too,  
Among our hills; for all those rippled rocks  
Up yonder were composed of blue sea-clay.  
I have found sea-weed in them, turned to  
stone,

The claws of crabs, the skeletons of fish.  
Think you that, if your Adriatic lay  
Where it now lies, its little sidling crabs  
Could scuttle through the Deluge to the hills?  
Your Deluge must have risen above the tops

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Of all the mountains. If it rose so high,  
Then it embraced the globe, and made our  
earth  
One smooth blue round of water. When it  
sank  
What chasm received those monstrous cata-  
racts?  
Or was the sun so hot it sucked them up  
And turned them into a mist?

Is not that tale  
A racial memory, lingering in our blood,  
Of realms that now lie buried in the sea,  
Or isles that heaved up shining from the deep  
In old volcanic throes?

### *Giulio.*

I must confess  
I always feel a pang, sir, when I see  
A man of talent wasting his fine powers  
On this blind road.

### *The Stranger.*

Show me a better way.

[100]

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

*Giulio.*

The way of Art, sir.

*The Stranger.*

Yes. That is a road  
I have wished that I might travel. But are  
you sure  
Our paths are not eventually the same?  
Why have you climbed up here? To paint  
the truth,  
As you perceive it, in those rocks and trees.  
Suppose that, with your skill of hand, you  
saw  
The truth more clearly, saw the lines of  
growth,  
The bones and structure of the world you  
paint,  
And the great rhythm of law that runs  
through all,  
Might you not paint them better even than  
now?  
Might you not even approach the final cause

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Of all our art and science,—the pure truth  
Which also is pure beauty?

*Giulio.*

Genius leaps  
Like lightning to that mark, sir, and can waive  
These pains and labours.

*The Stranger.*

O, I have no doubt  
That you are right. I speak with diffidence,  
And as a mere spectator; one who likes  
To know, and seizes on this happy chance  
Of learning what an artist really thinks.

*Giulio.*

We artists, sir, are not concerned with laws,  
Except to break them. Genius is a law  
Unto itself.

*The Stranger.*

And that is why you've made

[102]

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Your wood-smoke blue against that shining  
cloud?

Against the darker background of the hill  
It is blue in nature also; but it turns  
To grey against the sky.

*Giulio.*

I am not concerned

With trivial points.

*The Stranger.*

But if they point to truth  
Beyond themselves, and through that change  
of colour

Reveal its cause, and knit your scheme in  
law;

Nay, as a single point of light will speak  
To seamen of the land that they desire,  
Transfiguring all the darkness with one spark,  
Would this be trivial? Sir, a touch will do  
it.

Lend me your brush a moment. Had you  
drawn

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Your rocks here in the foreground, thus and  
thus,  
Following the ribbed lines of those beds of  
clay  
As the sea laid them, and the fire upheaved  
And cracked them, you'll forgive me if I say  
That they'd not only indicate the law  
Of their creation; but they'd look like rocks  
Instead of—

*Giulio.*

Pray don't hesitate.

*The Stranger.*

I speak

As a spectator only; but to me—  
Sponges or clouds perhaps—

*Giulio.*

We artists, sir,

Aim at this very effect. To us, the fact  
Is nothing. There is a kingdom of the mind,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Where all things turn to dreams. Nothing is  
true

In that great kingdom; and our subtlest work  
Is that which has no basis.

### *The Stranger.*

Then I fear

My thoughts are all astray; for I believed  
That kingdom to be more substantial far  
Than anything we see; and that the road  
Into that kingdom is the road of law  
Which we discover here,—the Word made  
Flesh.

### *Giulio.*

I do not understand you—quite. I fear  
Yours is the popular view—that art requires  
Purposes, meanings, even moralities  
With which we artists, sir, are not concerned.

### *The Stranger.*

O, no. I merely inquire. I wish to hear  
From one who knows. I am a little puzzled.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

You have dismissed so much—this outer world  
And all its laws; and now this other, too.  
I am no moralist; but I must confess  
That, in the greatest Art, I have always found  
A certain probity, a certain splendour  
Of inner and outer constancy to law.

### *Giulio.*

All genius is capricious. You'll admit  
That men who lived like beasts have painted  
well.

### *The Stranger.*

Yes; but not greatly, except when their own  
souls  
Have gripped the beast within them by the  
throat,  
And risen again to reassert the law.

### *Giulio.*

Art lives by its technique, a fact the herd

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Will never understand. A noble soul  
Is useless, if it cannot wield a brush.

### *The Stranger.*

May not technique include control and judgment?

Alone, they are not enough; but, for the heights,

More is required, not less. I'd even add  
Some factors you despise.

### *Giulio.*

Your shells, for instance?  
And that mysterious and invisible sea?

### *The Stranger.*

The sea whence Beauty rose.

### *Giulio.*

You have an eye  
For Beauty, too. You are a lover of art  
And you are rich. What opportunities

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

You throw away! Was it not you I saw  
Yesterday, in the market-place at Florence,  
Buying caged birds and tossing them into the  
air?

*The Stranger.*

It may have been. I like to see them fly.  
The structure of the wing,—I think that men  
Will fly one day.

*Giulio.*

It was not pity, then?

*The Stranger.*

I'd not exclude it. As I said before,  
I would include much.

*Giulio.*

You were speaking, sir,  
Of Art. There are so few, so very few  
Who understand what Art is.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

*The Stranger.*

Fewer still

Who know the few to choose.

*Giulio.*

Perhaps you'd care  
To see some work of mine. I do not live  
In Florence; but I'd like to set your feet  
On the right way. We are a little group  
Known to the few that know. You'd find our  
works  
Far better worth your buying than caged  
birds.  
Pray let me know your name, sir.

*The Stranger.*

Leonardo.

## II

### AT FLORENCE

I SAW the house at Florence, cool and white  
With violet shadows, drowsing in the sun.  
The fountain splashed and bubbled in the  
court.

Beside it, in a space of softened light,  
Under a linen awning, ten feet high,  
Roofing a half-enclosure, where three walls  
Were tinted to a pine-wood's blue-black  
shade,

I saw a woman seated on a throne,  
And Leonardo, with his radiant eyes,  
Glancing from his wet canvas to her face.

Her face was filled with music. Music  
swelled

Above them, from a gallery out of sight;  
And as the soft pulsation of the strings  
Died into infinite distances, he spoke.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

His voice was more than music. It was  
thought  
Ebbing and flowing, like a strange dark sea.

“Listen to me; for I have things to say  
That I can only tell the world through you.  
Were you not just a little afraid of me  
At first? You know by popular report  
I dabble in Black Arts, and so I would  
To keep you here, an hour or two each day,  
Until the mystery we have conjured up  
Between us—there again, it came and went—  
Smiles at the centuries in their masquerade  
As you smiled, then, at me.

Not mockery—quite—  
Not irony either; something we evoked  
That seems to have caught the ironist off his  
guard,  
And slyly observes the mocker’s naked heel.  
So we’ll defend humanity, you and I,  
Against the worst of tyrannies,—the blind  
sneer  
Of intellectual pride. The subtle fool  
And cunning sham at least shall meet one gaze

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

More subtle, more secure; not yours or mine,  
But Nature's own—that calm, inscrutable  
smile

Whereby each erring atomy is restored  
To its true place, taught its true worth at last,  
And heaven's divine simplicity renewed.

Not yours or mine, Madonna. Could I trust  
To brush and palette or my skill of hand  
For this? Oh, no! We need Black Arts, I  
think,

Black Arts and incantations, or you'd grow  
Weary of sitting here.

Last night I made  
Five bubbles of glass—you blow them with a  
pipe

Over a flame,—and set them there to dance  
Upon the fountain's feathery crest of spray.  
Piero thought it waste of time. He jeers  
At these mechanical arts of mine. I watched  
That dance and learned a little of the machine  
We call the world. I left them leaping there  
To catch your eyes this morning, and learned  
more.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

So one thing leads to another. A device,  
Mechanical as the spinning of the stars  
In the Arch-Mechanic's Cosmos, woke a  
gleam

Of wonder; and I lay these Black Arts bare  
To make you wonder more.

Black Arts, Madonna;

For even such trifles may discover depths  
Dark as the pit of death; as when I laid  
Dice on a drum, and by their trembling  
showed

Where underneath our armoured city walls  
The enemy dug his mines.

And now—you smile,  
To think how wars are won.

Catgut and wood  
Have served our wizardry. Yes; that's why  
I set

Musicians in the gallery overhead,  
To pluck their strings; and, while you  
listened, so

Painted the living spirit that they bound  
With their bright spells before me, in your  
face.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Black Arts, Madonna, and cold-blooded, too.  
O, sheer mechanical, playing upon your mind  
And senses, as they too were instruments,  
Or colours to be ground and mixed and used  
For purposes that were not yours at all,  
Until the living Power that uses me  
Breathes on this fabric, also made by hands,  
The inscrutable face that smiles all arts  
away.

How many tales I have told you sitting here  
To make you see, according to my need,  
The comedy of the world, its lights and  
shades:

The sensual feast; the mockery of renown;  
Youth and his innocent boastings, unaware  
How swiftly run the sands; Youth that be-  
lieves

His own bright scorn for others' aching faults  
Has crowned him conqueror; Youth so nobly  
sure

That plans are all achievements; quite, quite  
sure

Of his own victory where all others failed;

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Age, with blind eyes, or staring at defeat,  
Dishonoured; Age, in honour, with a wreath  
Of fading leaves in one old trembling hand,  
And at his feet the dark all-gulping grave;  
Envy, the lean and wizened witch behind him,  
Riding on death, like his own crooked  
shadow,  
Snapping at heaven with one contemptuous  
hand,  
As though she hated God; and, on her face,  
A mask of fairness; Envy, with those barbs  
Of wicked lightning darting from her flesh;  
Envy, whose eyes the palm and olive wound;  
Whose ears the laurel and myrtle pierce with  
pain;  
A fiery serpent eating at her heart;  
A quiver on her back with tongues for arrows.  
Each of these pictures left its little shadow,  
A little memory in your spellbound face,  
And so your picture smiles at all of these,  
And at one secret never breathed aloud,  
Because I think we knew it all too well.

Once only, in a riddle, I made you smile

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

At our own secret also, when I said  
'If liberty be dear to you, Madonna,  
Never discover that your painter's face  
Is Love's dark prison.'

Sailing to the south  
From our Cilicia, you and I have seen  
Beautiful Cyprus, rising from the wave;  
Cyprus, that island where Queen Venus  
reigned.

The blood of men was drawn to that rough  
coast

As tides, on other shores, obey the moon.

Glens of wild dittany, winding through the  
hills

From Paphos, her lost harbour, to the peak  
Of old Olympus, where she tamed the gods,  
Enticed how many a wanderer,

Odorous winds  
Welcomed us, ruffling, crumpling the smooth  
brine

Into a sea of violets. We drew near.

We heard the muffled thunder of the surf!

What ships, what fleets, had broken among  
those rocks!

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

We saw a dreadful host of shattered hulls,  
Great splintered masts, innumerable keels  
With naked ribs, like skeletons of whales  
All weltering there, half-buried in the  
sand.

The foam rushed through them. On their  
rotted prows  
And weed-grown poops the sea-gulls perched  
and screamed;  
And all around them with an eerie cry  
An icy wind was blowing.

It would seem  
Like the Last Judgment, should there ever  
be  
A resurrection of the ships we saw  
Lying there dead. These things we saw and  
live.

And now your picture smiles at all of these.  
The secret still evades me everywhere;  
And everywhere I feel it, close at hand.  
Do you remember when Vesuvius flamed  
And the earth shivered and cracked beneath  
our feet?

Ten villages were engulfed. I wandered out

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Among the smoking fragments of earth's  
crust  
To see if, in that breaking-up of things,  
Nature herself had now perhaps unsealed  
Some of her hidden wonders.

On that day,  
I found a monstrous cavern in the hills,  
A rift so black and terrible that it dazed me.  
I stood there, with my back bent to an arch,  
My left hand clutching at my knee, my right  
Shading contracted eyes. I strained to see  
Into that blackness, till the strong desire  
To know what marvellous thing might lurk  
within  
Conquered my fear. I took a ball of thread  
And tied one end to a lightning-blasted tree.  
I made myself a torch of resinous pine  
And entered, running the thread through my  
left hand,  
On, on, into the entrails of the world.

O, not Odysseus, when his halting steps  
Crept through that monstrous hollow to the  
dead,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Felt such a fearful loneliness as I;  
For there were voices echoing through *his*  
night,  
And shadows of lost friends to welcome him;  
But my fierce road to knowledge clove its  
way

Into a silence deeper than the grave,  
Into a darkness where not even a ghost  
Could stretch its hands out, even in farewell.  
And all that I could see around me there  
Was my own smoking torchlight, walls of  
rock

And awful rifts where other caverns yawned.  
And all that I could hear was my own steps  
Echoing through endless darkness, on and  
on.

My thread ran out. My torch was burning  
low,  
When, through the darkness, I became  
aware  
Of something darker, looming up in front;  
Solid as rock, and yet more strange and  
wild

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Than any shadow. My flesh and blood  
turned cold  
Before that awful Presence in the dark.  
I left the thread behind me, and crept on;  
Held up the guttering torch; and there, O  
there,  
I saw it, and I live.

A monstrous thing  
With jaws that might have crushed a ship,  
and bones  
That might upheave a mountain; a Minotaur,  
A dreadful god of beasts, now turned to stone,  
Like a great smoke-bleared idol. The wild  
light  
Smeared it with blood; a thing that once had  
lived;  
A thing that once might turn the sea to mist  
With its huge floundering, and would make  
a spoil  
For kingdoms with the ships it drove ashore.  
The torchlight flared against it, and went out;  
And I groped back, in darkness. . . .

And you smile.

O, what a marvel of enginery was there!

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

What giant thews and sinews once controlled

The enormous hinges of the rock-bound bones  
I saw in my dark cavern. Yet it perished,  
And all its monstrous race has perished, too.  
Was it all waste? Did it prepare the way  
For lordlier races? Even, perhaps, for men?

Only one life to track these wonders home,  
So many roads to follow. Never the light  
Till all be travelled.

We will not despise  
Mechanical arts, Madonna, while we use  
These marvellous living instruments of ours.  
Rather we'll seek to master for ourselves  
The Master's own devices. Birds can fly,  
And so shall men, when they have learned the  
law

Revealed in every wing. Far off, I have seen  
Men flying like eagles over the highest  
clouds;

Men that in ships like long grey swordfish  
glide

Under the sea; men that in distant lands

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Will speak to men in Italy; men that bring  
The distant near, and bind all worlds in one.  
And yet—I shall not see it. I have explored  
This human instrument, traced its delicate  
tree  
Of nerves, discovering how the life-blood  
flows  
Out of the heart, through every branching  
vein;  
And how, in age, the thickening arteries close  
And the red streams no longer feed this frame,  
And the parched body starves at last and dies.

I have built bridges. Armies tread them now.  
The rains will come. The torrents will roll  
down  
And sweep them headlong to the sea, one day.  
I have painted pictures. Let cicadas chirrup  
Of their brief immortality. I know  
How soon these colours fade.

And yet, and yet,  
I do not think the Master of us all  
Would set us in His outer courts at night  
As the Magnificent, once, in the flush of wine,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Set Angelo, to flatter an idle whim  
And sculpture him a godhead out of snow.

The work's not wasted. In my youth I  
thought

That I was learning how to live, and now  
I see that I was learning how to die.

Then comes the crowning wonder. We strip  
off

The scaffolding; for the law is learned at  
last;

And our reality, Parian then, not snow,  
Dares the full sun of morning, fronts the gaze  
Of its divine Pygmalion; lives and breathes;  
And knows, then, why it passed through all  
those pains.

Now—the last touch of all! And, as this face  
Begins to breathe against those ancient rocks,  
Let music breathe these arts of mine away."

Music awoke. It throbbed like hidden wings  
Above them. Then a minstrel's golden voice,  
As from a distance, on those wings arose  
And poured the Master's passion into song:

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

*Burn, Phœnix, burn;*  
*And, in thy burning, take*  
*All that love taught me, all I strove to learn,*  
*All that I made, and all I failed to make.*

*If it be true*  
*That from the fire thou rise*  
*In splendour, as men say dead worlds renew*  
*Their light from their own embers in the*  
*skies,*

*In thy fierce nest*  
*I'd share that death with thee,*  
*To make one shining feather on thy breast*  
*Of all I am, and all I strove to be.*

*The worthless bough*  
*May kindle a rich coal;*  
*And in our mingling ashes, how wilt thou*  
*Know mine from thine, ere both reclothe*  
*thy soul?*

*Now—as thy wings*  
*Arise from this proud fire,*  
*My dust in thy assumption mounts and sings;*  
*And, being a part of thee, I still aspire.*

## V—IN FRANCE

JEAN GUETTARD

### I

#### THE ROCK OF THE GOOD VIRGIN

**W**HOMO knows the name of Jean Guettard  
to-day?

I wrestled with oblivion all night long.  
At times a curtain on a lighted stage  
Would lift a moment, and fall back again.  
Once, in the dark, a sunlit row of vines  
Gleamed through grey mists on his invisible  
hill.

The mists rolled down. Then, like a miser,  
Night

Caught the brief glory in her blind cloak  
anew.

At dawn I heard the voice of Shadow-of-a-  
Leaf

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Breathing a quiet song. It seemed remote  
And yet was near, as when the listener's  
heart  
Fills a cold shell with its remembered waves.

“When I was young,” said Jean Guettard,  
“My comrades and myself would hide  
Beneath a tall and shadowy Rock  
In summer, on the mountain-side.  
The wind and rain had sculptured it—  
Such tricks the rain and wind will play,—  
To likeness of a Mother and Child;  
But wind and rain,” said Jean Guettard,  
“Have worn the rocks for many a day.”

“The peasants in that quiet valley,  
Among their vineyards bending there,  
Called it the Rock of the Good Virgin,  
And breathed it many an evening prayer.  
When I grew up I left my home  
For dark Auvergne, to seek and know  
How all this wondrous world was made;  
And I have learned,” said Jean Guettard,  
“How rains can beat, and winds can blow.”

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

“When I came home,” said Jean Guettard,

“Not fifty years had fleeted by.

I looked to see the Form I loved

With arms outstretched against the sky.

Flesh and blood as a wraith might go.

This, at least, was enduring stone.

I lifted heart and eyes aglow,

Over the vines,” said Jean Guettard. . . .

“The rain had beaten, the wind had blown,

The hill was bare as the sky that day.

Mother and Child from the height had gone.

The wind and rain,” said Jean Guettard,

“Had crumbled even the Rock away.”

“Shadow-of-a-Leaf,” I whispered, for I saw

The crosier of a fern against the grey;

And, as the voice died, he stood dark before  
me.

“You sang as though you loved him. Let the  
mists

Unfold.”

He smiled. “See, first, that Rock,” he said,

“Dividing them.”

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

At once, through drifting wreaths  
I saw a hill emerging, a green hill  
Clothed with the dying rainbow of those  
    tears  
The mist had left there. From the rugged  
    crest  
Slowly the last thin veils dissolved away.  
I saw the Rock upstanding on the height  
So closely, and so near me, that I knew  
Its kinship with the rocks of Fontainebleau;  
The sandstone whose red grains for many an  
    age  
Had been laid down, under a vanished sea;  
A Rock, upthrust from darkness into light,  
By buried powers, as power upthrust it now  
In the strong soul, with those remembering  
    hills,  
Till, graven by frost and beaten by wind and  
    rain,  
It slowly assumed the semblance of that Form  
Of Love, the Mother, holding in her arms  
The Child of Earth and Heaven; a shape of  
    stone;  
An image; but it was not made by hands.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Footsteps drew near. I heard an eager voice  
Naming a flower in Latin.

Up they came—  
Each with a bunch of wild flowers in his  
hand,—

A lean old man, with snowy wind-blown hair,  
Panting a little; and, lightly at his side,  
Offering a strong young arm, a sun-burnt boy,  
Of eighteen years, with darkly shining eyes.  
It was those eyes, deep, scornful, tender, gay,  
Dark fires at which all falsehood must con-  
sume,

That told me who they were—the young  
Guettard,  
And his old grandsire.

Under the Rock they stood.  
“Good-bye. I’ll leave you here,” the old man  
said.

“We’ve had good luck. These are fine speci-  
mens.

The last, perhaps, that we shall find together;  
For when you leave your home to-morrow,  
Jean,

I think you are going on a longer journey

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Even than you know. Perhaps, when you are famous,

You will not be so proud as I should be,  
Were I still living, to recall the days  
When even I, the old apothecary,  
Could teach you something."

Jean caught a wrinkled hand,  
Held it between his own, and laughed away  
That shadow, but old Descurain looked at  
him,

Proudly and sadly. "It will not rest with  
you,  
Or your affection, Jean. The world will see  
to it.

The world that knows as much of you and me,  
As you and I of how that creeper grew  
Around your bedroom window."

As he spoke,  
Along the lower slopes the mists began  
To blow away like smoke. The patch of  
vines

Crept out again; and, far below I saw,  
Sparkling with sun, the valley of the Juine,  
The shining river, and the small clear town

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Étampes, the grey old church, the clustering roofs,  
The cobbled square, the gardens, wet and bright  
With blots of colour.

“I have lived my life  
Out of the world, down there,” Descurain said,  
“Compounding simples out of herbs and flowers;  
Reading my Virgil in the quiet evenings,  
Alone, for all those years; and, then, with you.  
*O fortunatos*—Do we ever know  
Our happiness till we lose it? You’ll remember  
Those Georgics—the great praise of Science,  
Jean!  
And that immortal picture of the bees!  
No doubt you have chosen rightly. For myself,  
I know, at least, where healing dittany grows,  
And where earth’s beauty hides in its dark heart  
An anodyne, at last, for all our pain.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And one thing more I have learned, and see  
with awe

On every side, more clearly, that on earth  
There's not one stone, one leaf, one creeping  
thing,

No; nor one act or thought, but plays its part  
In the universal drama.

You'll look back  
One day on this lost bee-like life of mine;  
And find, perhaps, in its obscurest hour  
And lowliest task, the moment when a light  
Began to dawn upon a child's dark mind.  
The old pestle and mortar, and the shining  
jars,

The smell of the grey bunches of dried herbs,  
The little bedroom over the market-square,  
The thrifty little house where you were born,  
The life that all earth's great ones would  
despise—

All these, perhaps, were needed, as the hand  
That led you, first, in childhood to the hills.  
You'll see strange links, threads of effect and  
cause,

In complicated patterns, growing clear

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

And binding all these memories, each to each,  
And all in one; how one thing led to another,  
My simples to your love of plants and flowers,  
And this to your new interest in the haunts  
That please them best—the kinds of earth, the  
rocks,

And minerals that determine where they  
grow,

Foster them, or reject them. You'll discover  
That all these indirections are not ruled  
By chance, but by dark predetermined laws.

You'll grope to find what Power, what  
Thought, what Will,

Determined them; till, after many a year,  
At one swift clue, one new-found link, one  
touch,

They are flooded with a new transfiguring  
light,

Deep as the light our kneeling peasants know  
When, dumbly, at the ringing of a bell  
They adore the sacred elements; a light  
That shows all Nature, of which your life is  
part,

Bound to that harmony which alone sets free;

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And every grain of dust upon its way  
As punctual to its purpose as a star.

This Rock has played its part in many a life.  
We know it, for we see it every day.  
No angelus ever rang, but some one's eyes  
Were lifted to it; and, returning home,  
The wanderer strains to see it from the road.  
What is it, then? It plays no greater part  
Than any grain of dust beneath our feet,  
Could we discern it. A dumb block of stone,  
A shadow in the mind, a thought of God,  
A little fragment of the eternal order,  
That postulates the whole.

If we could see  
The universal Temple in which it stands  
We, too, should bow our heads; for if this  
Form  
Were shaped by Chance, it was the self-  
same Chance  
That gave us love and death. In this the fool  
Descries a reason for denying all  
To which our peasants kneel. The years to  
come

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

(And you will speed them, Jean) will rather  
make

This dust the floor of heaven."

The old man laid  
His bunch of herbs and flowers below the  
Rock,  
Smiled, nodded, and went his way.

"Was it by chance,"  
Thought Jean Guettard, "that grandad laid  
them so;

Or by design; or by some vaster art  
Transcending, yet including, all our thoughts,  
And memories, with those flowers and that  
dumb stone,

As chords in its world-music? Why should  
flowers

Laid thus"—he laid his own at the feet of the  
Rock—

"Transfigure it with such beauty that it stood  
Blessing him, from its arch of soft blue sky  
Above him, like a Figure in a shrine?"

He touched its glistening grains. "I think  
that Ray

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Was right," he murmured. "This was surely  
made  
Under the sea; sifted and drifted down  
From vanished hills and spread in level beds,  
Under deep waters; compressed by the sea's  
weight;  
Upheaved again by fire; and now, once more,  
Wears down by way of the rain and brook and  
river,  
Back to the sea; but all by roads of law."  
Then, looking round him furtively, to make  
sure  
No one was near, he dropped upon his knees.  
The mist closed over him. Rock and hill  
were lost  
In greyness once again.

## II

### MALESHERBES AND THE BLACK MILESTONES

MOMENTS were years,  
Till, at the quiet whisper of Shadow-of-a-  
Leaf,  
Those veils withdrew, and showed another  
scene.

I saw two dusty travellers, blithely walking  
With staffs and knapsacks, on a straight white  
road

Lined with tall sentinel poplars as to await  
A king's return; but scarce a bird took heed  
Of those two travel-stained wanderers—Jean  
Guettard

And Malesherbes, his old school-friend.

Larks might see

Two wingless dots that crept along the road.  
The Duke rode by and saw two vagabonds  
With keenly searching eyes, as they jogged on

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

To Moulins. Birds and Duke and horse  
could see,  
Against the sky, that old square prison-tower,  
The tall cathedral, the dark gabled roofs,  
Thronging together behind its moated wall;  
But not one eye in all that wide green land  
Saw what those two could see; and not one  
soul

Espied the pilgrim thought upon its way  
To change the world for man.

The pilgrim thought!

Say rather the swift hunter, tracking down  
More subtly than an Indian the dark spoor  
Of his gigantic prey.

I saw them halt  
Where, at the white road's edge, a milestone  
rose  
Out of the long grass, like a strange black  
gnome,  
A gnome that had been dragged from his dark  
cave  
Under the mountains, and now stood there  
dumb,  
Striving to speak. But what?

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

“There! There! Again!”  
Cried Jean Guettard. They stood and stared  
at it,  
But not to read as other travellers use  
How far themselves must journey.

They knelt down  
And looked at it, and felt it with their hands.  
A farmer passed, and wondered were they  
mad.

For, when they hailed him, and his tongue  
prepared  
To talk of that short cut across the fields  
Beside the mill-stream, they desired to know  
Whence the black milestone came. It was the  
fourth  
That they had passed since noon.

He grinned at them.  
“Black stones?” he said, “you’ll find them all  
the way  
To Volvic now!”

“To Volvic,” cried Guettard,  
“Volcani vicus!”

They seized their staffs again;  
Halted at Moulins, only to break a crust

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Of bread and cheese, and drink one bottle of  
wine,  
Then hastened on, following the giant trail,  
Milestone by milestone, till the scent grew  
hot;  
For now they saw, in the wayside cottages,  
The black stone under the jasmine's cluster-  
ing stars;  
And children, at the half-doors, wondered  
why  
Those two strange travellers pushed the leaves  
away  
And tapped upon their walls.

At last they saw,  
Black as a thundercloud anchored to its hill,  
Above the golden orchards of Limagne,  
The town of Riom. All its walls were  
black.  
Its turreted heights with leering gargoyle  
crawled  
Above them, like that fortress of old Night  
To which Childe Roland came.

No slughorn's note  
Challenged it, and they set no lance in rest,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

But dusty and lame, with strangely burning  
eyes,

Those footpads, quietly as the ancient Word,  
Stole into that dark lair and sought their prey.  
Surely, they thought, the secret must be  
known

To some that live, eat, sleep, in this grim den.  
Have they not guessed what monster lurks be-  
hind

This blackness?

In the chattering streets they saw  
The throng around the fruit-stalls, and the  
priest

Entering the Sainte Chapelle. With eyes of  
stone

The statue of that lover of liberty  
The chancellor, L'Hôpital, from his great  
dark throne

Gazed, and saw less than the indifferent spar-  
row

That perched upon his hand. Barefooted  
boys

Ran shouting round the fountain in the  
square.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

It was no dream. Along the cobbled street,  
Clattering like ponies in their wooden shoes,  
Three girls went by with baskets full of  
apples.

The princely butcher, standing at his door,  
Rosily breathing sawdust and fresh blood,  
Sleeked his moustache and rolled an amorous  
eye.

It was no dream. They lived their light-winged lives

In this prodigious fabric of black stone,  
Slept between walls of lava, drank their wine  
In taverns whose black walls had risen in  
fire;

Prayed on the slag of the furnace; roofed  
their tombs

With slabs of that slaked wrath; and saw no  
more

Than any flock of birds that nightly roost  
On the still quivering Etna.

It was late,  
Ere the two travellers found a wise old host  
Who knew the quarries where that stone was  
hewn;

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Too far for them that night. His inn could  
lodge them.

A young roast fowl? Also he had a wine,  
The Duc de Berry, once. . . . Enough! they  
supped

And talked. Gods, how they talked and ques-  
tioned him,—

The strangest guests his inn had ever seen.

They wished to know the shape of all the  
hills

Around those quarries. "There were many,"  
he said,

"Shaped at the top like this." He lifted up  
An old round-bellied wine-cup.

At the word  
He wellnigh lost his guests. They leapt to  
their feet.

They wished to pay their quittance and press  
on

To see those hills. But, while they raved, the  
fowl

Was laid before them, luscious, fragrant,  
brown.

He pointed, speechless, to the gathering dusk,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And poured their wine, and conquered.

“The Bon Dieu  
Who made the sensual part of man be  
praised,”  
He said to his wife; “for if He had made a  
world  
Of pure philosophers, every tavern in France  
Might close its shutters, and take down its  
sign.”

So Jean Guettard and Malesherbes stayed and  
supped;

And, ere they slept, being restless, they went  
out

And rambled through the sombre streets  
again.

They passed that haunted palace of Auvergne,  
Brooding on its wild memories and grim  
birth;

And from the Sainte Chapelle, uplifting all  
That monstrous darkness in one lean black  
spire

To heaven, they heard an organ muttering  
low

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

As though the stones once more were stirred  
to life

By the deep soul within. Then, arched and  
tall,

In the sheer blackness of that lava, shone  
One rich stained window, where the Mother  
stood,

In gold and blue and crimson, with the Child.  
They looked at it as men who see the life  
And light of heaven through the Plutonian  
walls

Of this material universe. They heard  
The young-voiced choir, in silver-throated  
peals,

Filling the night with ecstasy. They stood  
Bareheaded in the dark deserted street,  
Outcasts from all that innocence within,  
And silent; till the last celestial cry,  
Like one great flight of angels, ebbed away.

### III

#### THE SHADOW OF PASCAL

AT daybreak they pressed on. Strange hills  
arose  
Clustering before them, hills whose fragrant  
turf,  
Softer than velvet, hid what savage hearts!  
At noon they saw, beside the road, a gash  
Rending the sunlit skin of that green peace;  
An old abandoned quarry, half overgrown  
With ferns, and masked by boughs.

They left the road  
And looked at it. Volcanic rock! A flood  
Of frozen lava!  
They marked its glossy blackness, the rough  
cords  
And wrinkles where, as the fiery waves con-  
gealed,  
It had crept on a little; and strangely there

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

New beauty, like the smile on truth's hard face,  
Gleamed on them. Never did bracken and hart's tongue ferns  
Whisper a tale like those whose dauntless roots  
Were creviced in that grim rock. They tracked it up  
Through heather and thyme. They saw what human eyes  
Had seen for ages, yet had never seen,—  
The tall green hill, a great truncated cone,  
Robed in wild summer and haunted by the bee,  
But shaped like grey engravings that they knew  
Of Etna and Vesuvius.

Near its crest

They saw the sunlight on a shepherd's crook,  
Bright as a star. A flock of nibbling sheep  
Flowed round it like a cloud, a rambling cloud  
With drifting edges that broke and formed again

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Before one small black barking speck that  
flew

Swift as a bird about a cloud in heaven.

Thyme underfoot, wild honey in the thyme;  
But, under the thyme and honey, if eyes could  
see,

In every runnel and crevice and slip and  
patch,

A powdery rubble of pumice, black and red,  
Flakes of cooled lava and stones congealed  
from fire.

It was no dream. A butterfly spread its fans  
White, veined with green, on a rock of sunlit  
slag,

Slag of the seething furnaces below.

They reached the summit; and, under them,  
beheld

The hollow cup, the crater, whence that flood  
Out of the dreadful molten heart of the earth  
Poured in red fury to create Auvergne.

But now, instead of smoke and fire, they saw  
Red of the heather in that deep grassy hollow,  
And heard, instead of the hissing of the abyss,  
The small grey locust, stridulent in the sun.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

They came to Clermont. All its dark old  
streets

Were built of lava. By the *Place de Jaude*,  
O, strangely in their own swift race for truth,  
They met the phantom of an earlier fire!

They found the house where Pascal first be-  
held

The sunlight, through a window in lava-  
stone;

And many a time had passed, a brooding  
child,

With all his deep celestial thoughts to come,  
Through that volcanic porch, but never saw  
The wonder of the walls wherein he slept.

They saw, through mists, as I through mists  
discerned

Their own strange drama, that scene within  
the scene.

They climbed the very hill that Pascal made  
A beacon-height of truth—the *Puy de Dôme*,  
Where Florin Périer, at his bidding, took  
His tubes of soft quicksilver; and, at the base,  
And, at the summit, tested, proved, and  
weighed

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

The pressure of that lovely body of light,  
Our globe-engirdling air. On one swift hint,  
One flash of truth that Torricelli caught  
From Galileo, and Pascal caught in turn,  
He weighed that glory.

Ever the drama grew.

The vital fire, in yet more intricate ways  
(As life itself, enkindling point by point  
In the dark formless embryo, grows to  
power),  
Coursed on, from mind to mind, each working  
out

Its separate purpose, yet all linked in one.  
For those two pilgrims, on the cone-shaped  
hill

That Pascal knew, and yet had never known,  
Met his great spirit among the scoriac flakes,  
And found themselves, in vision, on that pure  
height

Where all the paths to truth shall one day  
meet.

They met his brooding spirit as they climbed.  
They passed the dead man's words from  
mouth to mouth,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

With new significance, deeper and more  
strange

Even than they knew. *"We are on fire to ex-  
plore*

*The universe, and build our tower of truth  
Into the Infinite. Then the firm earth laughs,  
Opens, under its cracked walls, an abyss."*—  
Lavoisier! Malesherbes! Friends of Jean  
Guettard.

*Was it only the whisper of Shadow-of-a-Leaf  
that showed me*

*Gleams of the Terror approaching, a wild  
storm*

*Of fiercer, hell-hot lava, and that far sound  
Of tumbrils. . . . The Republic has no  
need*

*Of savants!*

*This dream went by, with the  
dead man's words.*

They reached the highest crest. Before their  
eyes

The hill-scape opened like a mighty vision  
That, quietly, has come true.

They stood there, dumb,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

To see what they foresaw, the invisible  
thought

Grown firm as granite; for, as a man might  
die

In faith, yet wake amazed in his new world,  
They saw those chains of dead volcanoes rise,  
Cone behind cone, with green truncated  
crowns,

And smokeless craters, on the dazzling blue.  
There, in the very sunlit heart of France,  
They saw what human eyes had daily seen  
Yet never seen till now. They stood and  
gazed,

More lonely in that loneliness of thought  
Than wingèd men, alighting on the moon.

Old as the moon's own craters were those  
hills;

And all their wrath had cooled so long ago  
That as the explorers on their downward path  
Passed by a cup-shaped crater, smooth and  
green,

Three hundred feet in depth and breadth,  
they saw,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Within it, an old shepherd and his flock  
Quietly wandering over its gentle slopes  
Of short sweet grass, through clumps of saf-  
fron broom.

They asked him by what name that hill was  
known.

He answered, *The Hen's Nest!*

"Hen's Nest," cried Jean Guettard, "the good  
God grant

This fowl be not a phœnix and renew  
Its feathers in Auvergne."

They chuckled aloud,  
And left the shepherd wondering, many a day,  
What secret knowledge in the stranger's eye  
Cast that uncanny light upon the hill,  
A moment, and no more; and yet enough  
To make him feel, even when the north wind  
blew,

Less at his ease in that green windless cup;  
And, once or twice, although he knew not  
why,

He turned, and drove his flock another way.

## IV

### AT PARIS

“FEW know the name of Jean Guettard to-day,”

Said Shadow-of-a-Leaf; for now the mists concealed

All that clear vision. “I often visited him, Between the lights, in after years. He lived Alone at Paris then, in two lean rooms, A sad old prisoner, at the Palais Royal; And many a time, beside a dying fire, We talked together. I was only a shadow, A creature flickering on the fire-lit wall; But, while he bowed his head upon his hands And gazed into the flame with misted eyes, I could steal nearer and whisper time away. And sometimes he would breathe his thoughts aloud;

And when at night his faithful servant, Claire, Stole into the room to lay his frugal meal,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

She'd glance at him with big brown troubled  
eyes

To find him talking to himself alone.

And sometimes when the masters of the hour  
Won easy victories in the light world's fash-  
ion,

With fables, easily spun in light quick minds,  
He'd leave the Academy thundering its ap-  
plause,

And there, in his bare room, with none to see  
But Shadow-of-a-Leaf, he would unfold  
again

—Smiling a little grimly to himself—

Those curious beautiful tinted maps he drew,  
The very first that any man had made  
To show, beneath the kingdoms made by man,  
The truth, that hidden structure, ribbed with  
rock,

And track the vanished ages by the lives  
And deaths imprinted there.

They had made him rich  
In nothing but the truth.

He had mapped the rocks.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

“The time is not yet come,” he used to say,  
“When we can clothe them with a radiant  
Spring

Of happy meanings. I have never made  
A theory. That’s for happier men to come;  
It will be time to answer the great riddle  
When we have read the question.

Here and there

Already, I note, they use this work of mine  
And shuffle the old forerunner out of sight.  
No matter. Let the truth live. I shall watch  
Its progress, proudly, from the outer dark;  
More happily, I believe, thus free from self,  
Than if my soul went whoring after fame.  
One thing alone I’ll claim. It is not good  
To let all lies go dancing by on flowers.  
This—what’s his name?—who claims to be  
the first

To find a dead volcano in Auvergne,  
And sees, in that, only an easy road  
To glory for himself, shall find, ere long,  
One live volcano in old Jean Guettard.  
The fool has forced me to it; for he thinks  
That I’ll claim nothing. I prefer my peace;

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

But truth compels me here. I'll set my heel  
On him, at least. Malesherbes will bear me  
out.

As for the rest—no theory of the earth  
Can live without these rock-ribbed facts of  
mine,

The facts that I first mapped, I claim no  
more.

These rocks, these bones, these fossil ferns and  
shells,

Of which the grinning moon-calf makes a jest,  
A byword for all dotage and decay,  
Shall yet be touched with beauty, and reveal  
The secrets of the book of earth to man."

"He made no theory," whispered Shadow-of-a-Leaf,

"And yet, I think, he looked on all these  
things

Devoutly; on a sea-shell turned to stone  
As on a sacred relic, at whose touch  
Time opened like a gate, and let him pass  
Out of this mocking and ephemeral world  
Through the eternal ages, home to God.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And so I watched him, growing old and grey,  
In seeking truth; a man with enemies,  
Ten enemies for every truth he told;  
And friends that still, despite his caustic  
tongue,  
Loved him for his true heart.

Yet even these  
Never quite reached it; never quite discerned  
That even his gruffest words were but the  
pledge  
Of his own passionate truth; the harsh pained  
cry  
For truth, for truth, of one who saw the  
throng  
Bewildered and astray, the ways of love  
Grown tortuous, and the path to heaven  
grown dim  
Through man's unheed for truth.

I saw him greet  
Condorcet, at the Academy. "We have lost  
Two members. I condole with you, my  
friend.

It is their last *éloges* you'll speak to-day!  
How will you bury their false theories?

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

In irony, or in academic robes?  
No matter. There'll be only one or two  
Who really know; and I shall not be there  
To vex you, from my corner, with one smile.  
Lord, what a pack of lies you'll have to tell!  
It is the custom. When my turn arrives—  
'Twill not be long,—remember, please, I want  
'Truth, the whole truth, or nothing.'

I saw one night  
A member walking home with him—to thank  
him  
For his support that morning. Jean Guet-  
tard

Turned on his threshold, growling like a bear.  
"You owe me nothing. I believed my vote  
Was right, or else you never should have had  
it.

Pray do not think I liked you."

A grim door

Opened and closed like iron in the face  
Of his late friend and now indignant foe;  
To whom no less, if he had needed it,  
Guettard would still have given his own last  
sou.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

He came into his lonely room that night,  
'And sat and stared into the fluttering fire.  
I, Shadow-of-a-Leaf, was there; and I could  
see

More in his eyes than even Condorcet  
saw,  
Condorcet, who of all his friends remained  
Most faithful to the end.

But, at the hour  
When Claire would lay his supper, a light  
hand tapped  
Timidly on his door. He sat upright  
And turned with startled eyes.

“Enter,” he called.  
A wide-eyed, pale-faced child came creeping  
in.

“What! Little Claire!” he cried.  
“Your mother is not better!”

She stood before him,  
The fire-light faintly colouring her thin  
face,—  
“M’sieur, she is very ill. You are a doctor.  
Come, quickly.”

Through the narrow, ill-lighted streets

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Old Jean Guettard went hobbling, a small hand

Clutching his own, and two small wooden shoes

Clattering beside him, till the child began  
To droop. He lifted her gently in his arms  
And hobbled on. The thin, white, tear-stained  
face,

Pressing against his old grey-bristled cheek,  
Directed him, now to left and now to right.

“O, quick, M’sieur!” Then, into an alley,  
dark

As pitch, they plunged. The third door on  
the right!

Into the small sad house they went, and  
saw

By the faint guttering candle-light—the  
mother,

Shivering and burning on her tattered bed.

Two smaller children knelt on either side

Worn out with fear and weeping.

All that night

Guettard, of all true kings of science then,  
Obscure, yet first in France and all the world,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Watched, laboured, bathed the brow and  
raised the head,  
Moistened the thirsting lips, and knew it  
vain;  
Knew, as I knew, that in a hundred years  
Knowledge might conquer this; but he must  
fight  
A losing battle, and fight it in the dark  
No better armed than Galen.

He closed her eyes  
At dawn. He took the children to his house;  
Prayed with them; dried their tears; and,  
while they slept,  
Shed tears himself, remembering—a green  
hill,  
A Rock against the sky.

He cared for them, as though they were his  
own.

Guettard, the founder of two worlds of  
thought,  
Taught them their letters. “None can tell,”  
he said,  
“What harvests are enfolded for the world

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

In one small grain of this immortal wheat.  
But I, who owe so much to little things  
In childhood ; and have seen, among the rocks,  
What vast results may wait upon the path  
Of one blind life, under a vanished sea,  
Bow down in awe before this human life.”

# V

## THE RETURN

EVER, as he grew older, life became  
More sacred to him.

“In a thousand years  
Man will look back with horror on this world  
Where men could babble about the Lamb of  
God,

Then turn and kill for food one living thing  
That looks through two great eyes, so like  
their own.

I have had living creatures killed for me;  
But I will have no more.”

“Though Nature laughed  
His mood to scorn,” said Shadow-of-a-Leaf,  
“the day

Will come (I have seen it come a myriad  
times)

When, through one mood like this, Nature  
will climb

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Out of its nature, and make all things new.  
Who prophesied cities, when the first blind  
    life  
Crawled from the sea, to breathe that strange  
    bright air,  
And conquer its own past?"—  
"I have no theory of this wild strange world,"  
Said Jean Guettard,  
"But, if the God that made it dies with us  
Into immortal life. . . ."  
"There, there's the meaning," whispered  
    Shadow-of-a-Leaf,  
"Could we but grasp it. There's the har-  
    mony  
Of life, and death, and all our mortal pain."  
I heard that old man whispering in the dark,  
"O, little human life, so lost to sight  
Among the eternal ages, I, at least,  
Find in this very darkness the one Fact  
That bows my soul before you."

Once again

The mists began to roll away like smoke.  
I saw a patch of vines upon the hill  
Above Étampes; and through the mists I saw

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Old Jean Guettard, with snowy wind-blown  
hair,  
Nearing the shrouded summit. As he  
climbed,  
Slowly the last thin veils dissolved away.  
He lifted up his eyes to see the Rock.  
The hill was bare. His facts were well con-  
firmed.  
Sun, wind, and rain, and the sharp chisels of  
frost  
Had broken it down. The Rock was on its  
way  
In brook and river, with all the drifting hills,  
And all his life, to the remembering sea.  
He looked around him, furtively. None was  
near.  
Down, on his knees,  
Among the weather-worn shards of his lost  
youth,  
Dropt Jean Guettard.

The mist closed over him.  
The world dissolved away. The vision died,  
Leaving me only a voice within the heart,  
Far off, yet near, the whisper of Shadow-of-  
a-Leaf.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

*The rain had beaten. The wind had blown.  
The hill was bare as the sky that day.  
Mother and Child from the height had gone.  
The wind and rain, said Jean Guettard,  
Had crumbled even the Rock away.*



## VI—IN SWEDEN

### LINNÆUS

**I**T was his garden that began it all,  
A magical garden for a changeling child.

“The garden has bewitched him!  
Carl! Carl! O, Carl! Now where is that  
elfkin hiding?”

It was the voice of Christina, wife of the  
Pastor,  
Nils Linnæus, the Man of the Linden-tree.  
Youthful and comely, she stood at her door in  
the twilight,  
Calling her truant son.

Her flaxen hair  
Kerchiefed with crisp white wings; her rose-  
coloured apron  
And blue-grey gown, like a harebell, yielding  
a glimpse

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Of the shapeliest ankle and snowiest stocking  
in Sweden;  
She stood at her door, a picture breathed upon  
air.

She called yet again, and tilted her head to  
listen  
As a faint, flushed, wild anemone turning  
aside  
From a breeze out of elf-land, teasing her  
delicate petals,  
The breeze of the warm, white, green-veined  
wings of her wooer;  
And again, a little more troubled at heart, she  
called,  
“Supper-time, Carl!”

But out of the fragrant pinewoods  
Darkening round her, only the wood-pigeon  
cooed.  
Down by the lake, from the alders, only the  
red-cap  
Whistled three notes. Then all grew quiet  
again.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Yet, he was there, she knew, though he did not answer.

The lad was at hand, she knew, though she could not see him.

Her elf-child, nine years old, was about and around her,

A queer little presence, invisible, everywhere, nowhere,

Hiding, intensely still. . . .

She listened; the leaves

All whispered, "Hush!"

It was just as though Carl had whispered,

"Hush! I am watching.

"Hush! I am thinking.

"Hush! I am listening, too."

She tiptoed through the garden, her fair head  
Turning to left and right, with birdlike  
glances,

Peeping round lichenized boulders and clumps  
of fern.

She passed by the little garden his father gave  
him,

Elfdom within an elfdom, where he had sown

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Not only flowers that rightly grow in gardens,  
The delicate aristocracies of bloom,  
But hedgerow waifs and ragamuffin strays  
That sprawled across his borders everywhere  
And troubled even the queendom of the rose  
With swarming insurrections.

At last she saw him,  
His tousled head a little golden cloud  
Among the dark green reeds at the edge of the  
lake,  
Bending over the breathless water to watch—  
What?

She tiptoed nearer, until she saw  
The spell that bound him. Floating upon the  
lake,  
A yard away, a water-lily closed  
Its petals, as an elfin cygnet smooths  
Its ruffled plumes, composing them for sleep.

He watched it, rapt, intent.

She watched her son,  
Intent and rapt, with a stirring at her heart,  
And beautiful shining wonder in her eyes,  
Feeling a mystery near her.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Shadow-of-a-Leaf  
Whispered. The garden died into the dark.  
Mother and child had gone—I knew not  
whither.

It seemed as though the dark stream of the  
years  
Flowed round me.

Then, as one that walks all night  
Lifts up his head in the early light of dawn,  
I found myself in a long deserted street  
Of little wooden houses, with thatched roofs.  
It was Uppsala.

Over the silent town  
I heard a skylark quivering, up and up,  
As though the very dew from its wild wings  
Were shaken to silvery trills of elfin song.  
*Tirile, tirile, tirile*, it arose,  
Praising the Giver of one more shining day.

Then, with a clatter of doors and a yodelling  
call  
Of young men's voices, the Svartbäcken  
woke;  
And down the ringing street the students came

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

In loose blue linen suits, knapsack on back  
And sturdy stick in hand, to rouse old Carl  
For their long ramble through the blossom-  
ing fields.

I saw them clustering round the Master's  
door.

I heard their jolly song—*Papa Linnæus*:

Linnæus, Papa Linnæus,  
He gave his pipe a rap.

He donned his gown of crimson.  
He donned his green fur-cap.

He walked in a meadow at daybreak  
To see what he might see;  
And the linnet cried, "Linnæus!  
O hide! Here comes Linnæus.

Beware of old Linnæus,  
The Man of the Linden-tree."

So beautiful, bright and early  
He brushed away the dews,  
He found the wicked wild-flowers  
All courting there in twos;  
And buzzing loud for pardon,  
Sir Pandarus, the bee:

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

“Vincit Amor, Linnæus,  
Linnæus, Papa Linnæus!”

O, ho, quoth old Linnæus,  
The Man of the Linden-tree.

Quoth he, 'Tis my conviction  
These innocents must be wed!

So he murmured a benediction,  
And blessed their fragrant bed;

And the butterflies fanned their blushes  
And the red-cap whistled in glee,

*They are married by old Linnæus,  
Linnæus, Papa Linnæus!*

*Vivat, vivat Linnæus,  
The Man of the Linden-tree.*

*Vivat Linnæus!* And out the old Master  
came,

Jauntily as a throstle-cock in Spring,  
His big bright eyes aglow; the fine curved  
beak,

The kindly lips, the broad well-sculptured  
brow,

All looked as though the wisdom that had  
shaped them

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Desired that they should always wear a smile  
To teach the world that kindness makes men  
happy.

He shook his head at his uproarious troop,  
And chose his officers for the day's campaign:  
One, for a marksman, with a fowling-piece,  
To bring down bird or beast, if need arose;  
One for a bugler, to recall their lines  
From echoing valley and hill, when some-  
thing rare

Lay in the Master's hand; one to make notes  
Of new discoveries; one for discipline; all  
For seeking out the truth, in youth and joy.  
To-day they made for Jumkil, miles away  
Along the singing river, where that prize  
The *Sceptrum Carolinum* used to grow.  
And, ever as they went, Linnæus touched  
All that they saw with gleams of new delight.  
As when the sun first rises over the sea  
Myriads of ripples wear a crest of fire;  
And over all the hills a myriad flowers  
Lift each a cup of dew that burns like wine;  
And all these gleams reflect one heavenly  
light;

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

He changed the world around him; filled the  
woods

With rapture; made each footpath wind away  
Into new depths of elfin-land. The ferns  
Became its whispering fringe; and every stile  
A faerie bridge into a lovelier world.

His magic sunlight touched the adventurous  
plants

That grew on the thatch of wayside cottages,  
*Crepis* and *Bromus*, with the straggling brood  
Of flowers he called *tectorum*, dancing there  
Above the heads of mortals, like swart gnomes  
In rusty red and gold.

“My Svartbäck Latin,”  
Linnæus laughed, “may make the pedants  
writhe;  
But I would sooner take three slaps from  
Priscian  
Than one from Mother Nature.”

Ancient books  
Had made their pretty pattern of the world.  
They had named and labelled all their flowers  
by rote,  
Grouping them in a little man-made scheme

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Empty of true significance as the wheel  
Of stars that Egypt turned for her dead kings.  
His was the very life-stream of the flowers;  
And everywhere in Nature he revealed  
Their subtle kinships; wedded bloom and  
bloom;  
Traced the proud beauty, flaunting in her  
garden,  
To gipsy grandsires, camping in a ditch;  
Linked the forgotten wanderers to their  
clan;  
Grouped many-coloured clans in one great  
tribe;  
And gathered scores of scattered tribes again  
Into one radiant nation.

He revealed  
Mysterious clues to changes wild as those  
That Ovid sang—the dust that rose to a stem,  
The stem that changed to a leaf, the crowning  
leaf  
That changed to a fruitful flower; and, under  
all,  
Sustaining, moving, binding all in one,  
One Power that like a Master-Dramatist,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Through every act and atom of the world  
Advanced the triumph that must crown the  
whole.

Unseen by man—that drama—here on earth  
It must be; but could man survey the whole,  
As even now, in flashes, he discerns  
Its gleaming moments, vanishing sharp-  
etched scenes

Loaded with strange significance, he would  
know,  
Like Shadow-of-a-Leaf, that not a cloud can  
sail

Across a summer sky, but plays its part.  
There's not a shadow drifting on the hills,  
Or stain of colour where the sun goes down,  
Or least bright flake upon the hawk-moth's  
wing

But that great drama needs them.

The wild thrush,  
The falling petal, the bubble upon the brook,  
Each has its cue, to sing, to fall, to shine,  
And exquisitely responds. The drunken bee  
Blundering and stumbling through a world of  
flowers

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Has his own tingling entrances, unknown  
To man or to himself; and, though he lives  
In his own bee-world, following his own law,  
He is yet the unweeting shuttle in a loom  
That marries rose to rose in other worlds,  
And shapes the wonder of Springs he cannot  
see.

O, little bee-like man, thou shalt not raise  
Thy hand, or close thine eyes, or sigh in  
sleep;  
But, over all thy freedom, there abides  
The law of this world-drama.

Under the stars,  
Between sweet-breathing gardens in the dusk,  
I heard the song of the students marching  
home.

I saw their eyes, mad nightingales of joy,  
Shining with youth's eternal ecstasy.  
I saw them tossing vines entwined with  
flowers  
Over girls' necks, and drawing them all  
along;  
Flags flying, French horns blowing, kettle-  
drums throbbing,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

And Carl Linnæus marching at their head.  
Up to the great old barn they marched for  
supper,—  
Four rounds of beef and a cask of ripened ale;  
And, afterwards, each with his own flower-  
fettered girl,  
They'd dance the rest of the summer night  
away.

Greybeards had frowned upon this frolic  
feast;  
But Carl Linnæus told them “Youth's a  
flower,  
And we're botanic students.”

Many a time,  
In green fur-cap and crimson dressing-gown,  
He sat and smoked his pipe and watched them  
there  
On winter nights; and when the fiddles played  
His Polish dance, Linné would shuffle it too.  
But now, to-night—they had tramped too  
many miles.

The old man was tired. He left them at the  
door,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And turned to his own house, as one who  
leaves

Much that he loved behind him.

As he went  
They cheered their chief—“Vivat, vivat,  
Linnæus!”

And broke into their frolic song again.

I saw him in the shadowy house alone  
Entering the room, above whose happy door  
The watchword of his youth and his old  
age

Was written in gold—*Innocue vivito.*  
*Numen adest.*

I saw him writing there  
His last great joyous testament, to be read  
Only by his own children, as he thought,  
After he'd gone; an ecstasy of praise,  
As though a bird were singing in his mind,  
Praise, praise, to the Giver of life and love  
and death!

*God led him with His own Almighty Hand,  
And made him grow up like a goodly tree.*

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

*God filled his heart with such a loving fire  
For truth, that truth returned him love for  
love.*

*God aided him, with all that his own age  
Had yet brought forth, to speed him on his  
way.*

*God set him in a garden, as of old,  
And gave him, for his duty and delight,  
The task that he loved best in all the world.*

*God gave him for his help-mate, from his  
youth*

*Into old age, the wife he most desired.*

*And blessed him with her goodness.*

*God revealed*

*His secrets to him; touched his eyes with  
light*

*And let him gaze into His Council Hall.*

*God so determined even his defeats*

*That they became his greatest victories.*

*God made his enemies as a wind to fill  
His homeward-rushing sails. Wherever he  
went*

*The Lord was with him, and the Lord upheld  
him.*

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And yet, O yet, one glory was to come;  
One strangest gate into infinitude  
Was yet to be swung back and take him home.  
*I know not how the fields that gave us birth  
Draw us with sweetness, never to be forgotten  
Back through the dark.*

I saw him groping out,  
As through a mist, into a shadowy garden;  
And this was not Uppsala any more,  
But the lost garden where his boyhood  
reigned.

The little dwindling path at Journey's End  
Ran through the dark, into a path he knew.

*Carl! Carl! Carl! Now where is that elf-  
kin hiding!*

Down by the lake, from the alders, only the  
red-cap  
Whistled three notes. Then all grew quiet  
again.

*Carl! O Carl!* Her voice, though he could  
not answer,  
Called him. He knew she was there, though  
he could not see her.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

He stood and listened. The leaves were listening, too.

He tiptoed through the garden. His grey head

Turning to left and right with birdlike glances.

He passed by the little garden his father gave him.

He knew its breath in the night.

His heart stood still.

She was there. He saw her at last. Her back was towards him.

He saw her fair young head, through the deepening shadows,

Bending, breathlessly, forward to watch a child

At the edge of the lake, who watched a floating flower.

He watched her, rapt, intent. She watched her son,

Intent and rapt.

Tears in his heart, he waited, dark and still, Feeling a mystery near him.



## VII—LAMARCK AND THE REVOLUTION

### I

#### LAMARCK AND BUFFON

WHAT wars are these? Far off, a bugle  
blew.

Out of oblivion rose the vanished world.  
I stood in Amiens, in a narrow street  
Outside a dark old college. I saw a boy,  
A budding Abbé, pallid from his books,  
Beaked like a Roman eagle. He stole out  
Between grim gates; and stripping off his  
bands,

Hastened away, a distance in his eyes;  
As though, through an earthly bugle, he had  
heard

A deeper bugle, summoning to a war  
Beyond these wars, with enemies yet unknown.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

I saw him bargaining for a starveling horse  
In Picardy and riding to the North,  
Over chalk downs, through fields of poppied  
wheat.

A tattered farm lad, sixteen years of age,  
Followed like Sancho at his master's heel:  
Up to the flaming battle-front he rode;  
Flinging a stubborn "no" at those who'd send  
him

Back to learn war among the raw recruits,  
He took his place before the astonished ranks  
Of grenadiers, and faced the enemy's fire.  
Death swooped upon them, tearing long red  
lanes

Through their massed squadrons. His com-  
mander fell

Beside him. One by one his officers died.  
Death placed him in command. The shat-  
tered troops

Of Beaujolais were wavering everywhere.  
"Retreat!" the cry began. In smoke and fire,  
Lamarck, with fourteen grenadiers, held on.  
"This is the post assigned. This post we hold  
Till Life or Death relieve us."

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Who assigned it?

Who summoned him thither? And when  
peace returned

Was it blind chance that garrisoned Lamarck  
Among the radiant gardens of the south,  
Dazzled him with their beauty, and then  
slipt

That volume of Chomel into his hand,  
*Traité des Plantes?*

Was it blind accident,  
Environment—O, mighty word that masks  
The innumerable potencies of God,—  
When his own comrade, in wild horse-play,  
wrenched

And crippled him in body, and he returned  
Discharged to Paris, free to take up arms  
In an immortal army? Was it chance  
That lodged him there, despite his own de-  
sire,

So high above the streets that all he saw  
Out of his window was the drifting clouds  
Flowing and changing, drawing his lonely  
mind

In subtle ways to Nature's pageantry,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And the great golden laws that governed all?

Was it blind chance that drew him out to  
watch

The sunset clouds o'er Mont Valérien,

Where the same power, for the same purpose,  
drew

Jean Jacques Rousseau? Flowers and the  
dying clouds

Drew them together, and mind from mind  
caught fire?

What universal Power through all and each  
Was labouring to create when first they met  
And talked and wondered, whether the forms  
of life

Through earth's innumerable ages changed?  
Were species constant? Let the rose run wild,  
How swiftly it returns into the briar!

Transplant the southern wilding to the north  
And it will change, to suit the harsher sky.  
Nourish it in a garden,—you shall see  
The trailer of the hedgerow stand upright,  
And every blossom with a threefold crown.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Buffon, upon his hill-top at Montbard  
In his red turret, among his flowers and birds,  
Gazing through all his epochs of the world,  
Had guessed at a long ancestry for man,  
Too long for the upstart kings.

He could not prove it;  
And the Sorbonne, with *Genesis* in its hand,  
Had frowned upon his æons. *In six days*  
*God made the heaven and earth.*

He had withdrawn,  
Smiling as wise men smile at children's talk;  
And when Lamarck had visited him alone,  
He smiled again, a little ironically.  
"Six epochs of the world may mean six days;  
But then, my friend, six days must also mean  
Six epochs. Call it compromise, or peace.  
They cannot claim the victory.

There are some  
Think me too—orthodox. O, I know the  
whine  
That fools will raise hereafter. Buffon  
quailed;  
Why did not Buffon like our noble selves  
Wear a vicarious halo of martyrdom?

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Strange—that desire of small sadistic eyes  
At ease on the shore to watch a shipwrecked  
man

Drowning. Lucretius praised that barbarous  
pleasure.

Mine is a subtler savagery. I prefer  
To watch, from a little hill above their world,  
The foes of science, floundering in the waves  
Of their new compromise. Every crooked  
flash

Of irony lightening their dark skies to-day  
Shows them more wickedly buffeted, in a sea  
Of wilder contradictions.

I had no proof.  
Time was not ripe. The scripture of the rocks  
Must first be read more deeply. But the law  
Pointed to one conclusion everywhere,  
That forms of flesh and bone, in the long lapse  
Of time, were plastic as the sculptor's clay,  
And born of earlier forms.

Under man's eyes,  
Had not the forms of bird and beast been  
changed

Into new species? Children of the wolf,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Greyhound and mastiff, in their several kinds,  
Fawned on his children, slept upon his hearth.  
The spaniel and the bloodhound owned one  
sire.

Man's own selective artistry had shaped  
New flowers, confirmed the morning glory's  
crown,

And out of the wild briar evoked the rose.

Like a magician, in a few brief years,  
He had changed the forms and colours of his  
birds.

He had whistled the wild pigeons from the  
rocks;

And by his choice, and nature's own deep law,  
Evoked the rustling fan-tails that displayed  
Their splendours on his cottage roof, or bowed  
Like courtiers on his lawn. The pouter  
swelled

A rainbow breast to please him. Tumblers  
played

Their tricks as for a king. The carrier flew  
From the spy's window, or the soldiers' camp,  
The schoolboy's cage, the lover's latticed  
heart,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And bore his messages over turbulent seas  
And snow-capt mountains, with a sinewy wing  
That raced the falcon, beating stroke for  
stroke."

## II

### LAMARCK, LAVOISIER, AND NINETY-THREE

So, seizing the pure fire from Buffon's hand,  
Lamarck pressed on, flinging all else aside,  
To follow all those clues to his own end.  
Ten years he spent among the flowers of  
France,  
Unravelling, and more truly than Linné,  
The natural orders of their tangled clans;  
Then, in "six months of unremitting toil,"  
As Cuvier subtly sneered, he wrote his book,  
The *Flore Française*; compact, as Cuvier  
knew,  
And did not care to say, with ten years'  
thought.  
But Buffon did not sneer. The great old man,  
A king of men, enthroned there at Montbard,  
Aided Lamarck as Jove might aid his son.  
He sent the book to the king's own printing  
press.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Daubenton wrote his foreword; and Rousseau  
Had long prepared the way.

“Linné of France,”

The stream of praise through every salon  
flowed.

*Une science à la mode*, great Cuvier sneered.

Was it blind chance that crushed Lamarck  
again

Back to his lean-ribbed poverty?

Buffon died.

Lamarck, who had married in his prosperous  
hour,

Had five young mouths to feed. With ten  
long years

Of toil he had made the great *Jardin du Roi*  
Illustrious through the world. As his reward  
The ministers of the king now granted him  
A keepership at one thousand francs a year;  
And, over him, in Buffon’s place, they set  
The exquisite dilettante, Bernardin  
Saint Pierre, a delicate twitcher of silken  
strings.

Lamarck held grimly to the post assigned.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Under that glittering rose-pink world he  
heard

Titanic powers upsurging from the abyss.  
Then, in the blood-red dawn of ninety-three,  
The bright crust cracked. The furious lava  
rolled

Through Paris, and a thundercloud of doom  
Pealed over thrones and peoples. Flash on  
flash,

Blind lightnings of the guillotine replied.  
Blind throats around the headsman's basket  
roared.

The slippery cobbles were greased with hu-  
man blood.

The torch was at the gates of the Bastille.

Old towers, old creeds, old wrongs, at a  
Mænad shout,

Went up in smoke and flame. Earth's dynas-  
ties

Rocked to their dark foundations. Tyrants  
died;

But in that madness of the human soul  
They did not die alone. Innocence died;  
And pity died; and those whose hands upheld

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

The torch of knowledge died in the bestial storm.

Lavoisier had escaped. They lured him back  
Into the Terror's hot red tiger-mouth,  
Promising, "Face your trial with these your  
friends,

And all will be set free. If not, they die."  
He faced it, and returned. The guillotine  
Flashed down on one and all.

Let the wide earth,  
Still echoing its old wrath against the kings  
And priests who exiled, stoned and burned  
and starved

The bearers of the fire, remember well  
How the Republic in its red right hand  
Held up Lavoisier's head, and told mankind  
In mockery, colder than the cynical snarl  
Of Nero, "The Republic has no need  
Of savants. Let the people's will be done  
On earth, and let the headless trunk of Truth  
Be trampled down by numbers. Tread in the  
mire

All excellence and all skill. Daub your raw  
wounds

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

With dirt of the street; elect the sick to health.  
It is the people's will, and they shall live.  
Nay, crown the eternal Power who rules by  
law

With this red cap of your capricious will,  
And ye shall hear His everlasting voice  
More clearly than ye heard it when He  
spoke

In stillness, through the souls of lonely men,  
On starry heights. Lift up your heads and  
hear

His voice in the whirling multitude's wild-  
beast roar,

*Not these men, but Barabbas."*

Must the mind

Turn back to tyranny, then, and trust anew  
To harnessed might? The listening soul still  
heard

A more imperative call. Though Evil wore  
A myriad masks and reigned as wickedly  
In peoples as in kings, Truth, Truth alone,  
Whether upheld by many or by few,  
Wore the one absolute crown. Though Pilate  
flung

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

His murderous jest at Truth—the law remained

That answered his dark question; man's one clue,

The law that all true seekers after Truth  
Hold in their hands; the law, a golden thread  
That, loyally followed, leads them to full  
light,

Each by his own dark way, till all the world  
Is knit together in harmony that sets free.

Bridge-builders of the universe, they fling  
Their firm and shining roads from star to star,  
From earth to heaven. At his appointed task,  
Lamarck held grimly on (as once he gripped  
His wavering grenadiers) till Life or Death  
Relieved him. But he knew his cause at last.  
*Jardin du Roi* became *Jardin des Plantes*;  
And the red tumult surging round his walls  
Died to a whisper of leaves.

His mind groped back,  
Back through the inconceivable ages now,  
To terrible revolutions of the globe,  
Huge catastrophic rendings of the hills,  
Red floods of lava; cataracts of fire;

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Monstrous upheavals of the nethermost deep;  
Whereby as Cuvier painted them, in hues  
Of blind disaster, all the hosts of life  
In each æonian period, like a swarm  
Of ants beneath the wheels of Juggernaut,  
Were utterly abolished.

Did God create  
After each earth-disaster, then, new hosts  
Of life to range her mountains and her seas;  
New forms, new patterns, fresh from His  
careless Hand,  
Yet all so closely akin to those destroyed?  
Or did this life-stream, from one fountain-  
head,  
Through the long changes of unnumbered  
years  
Flow on, unbroken, slowly branching out  
Into new beauty, as a river winds  
Into new channels? One, singing through the  
hills,  
Mirrors the hanging precipice and the pine;  
And one through level meadows curves away,  
Turns a dark wheel, or foams along a weir,  
Then, in a pool of shadow, drowns the moon.

### III

#### AN ENGLISH INTERLUDE: ERASMUS DARWIN

ALREADY in England, bearing the same fire,  
A far companion whom he never knew  
Had long been moving on the same dark  
quest,  
But through what quiet secluded walks of  
peace.

Out of the mist emerged the little City  
Of Lichfield, clustering round its Minster  
Pool  
That, like a fragment of the sky on earth,  
Reflected its two bridges, gnarled old trees,  
Half-timbered walls; a bare-legged child at  
play  
Upon its brink; two clouds like floating  
swans,  
Two swans like small white clouds; a boy that  
rode

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

A big brown cart-horse lazily jingling by;  
And the cathedral, like a three-spired crown,  
Set on its northern bank.

Then, from the west,  
Above it, walled away from the steep street,  
I saw Erasmus Darwin's bluff square house.  
Along its front, above the five stone steps  
That climbed to its high door, strange vines  
and fronds  
Made a green jungle in their dim prison of  
glass.

Behind, its windows overlooked a close  
Of rambling mellow roofs, and coldly stared  
At the cathedral's three foreshortened spires,  
Which seemed to draw together, as though in  
doubt  
Of what lay hidden in those bleak staring  
eyes.

There dwelt that eager mind, whom fools de-  
ride  
For laced and periwigged verses on his  
flowers;  
Forgetting how he strode before his age,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And how his grandson caught from his right  
hand  
A fire that lit the world.

I saw him there,  
In his brown-skirted coat, among his plants,  
Pondering the thoughts, at which that  
dreamer sneered,  
Who, through a haze of opium, saw a star  
Twinkling within the tip of the crescent  
moon.

Dispraise no song for tricks that fancy plays,  
Nor for blind gropings after an unknown  
light,

But let no echo of Abora praise for this  
The drooping pinion and unseeing eye.  
Seek, poet, on thy sacred height, the strength  
And glory of that true vision which shall  
grasp,

In clear imagination, earth and heaven,  
And from the truly seen ascend in power  
To those high realms whereof our heaven and  
earth

Are images and shadows, and their law  
Our shining lanthorn and unfailing guide.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

There, if the periwigged numbers failed to  
fly,

Let babbling dreamers who have also failed  
Wait for another age. The time will come  
When all he sought and lost shall mount and  
sing.

He saw the life-stream branching out before  
him,

Its forms and colours changing with their sky :  
Flocks in the south that lost their warm white  
fleece ;

And, in the north, the stubble-coloured hare  
Growing snow-white against the winter snows.  
The frog that had no jewel in his head,  
Except his eyes, was yet a fairy prince,  
For he could change the colours of his coat  
To match the mud of the stream wherein he  
reigned ;

And, if he dwelt in trees, his coat was green.  
He saw the green-winged birds of Paraguay  
Hardening their beaks upon the shells they  
cracked ;

The humming-bird, with beak made needle-  
fine

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

For sucking honey from long-throated  
blooms;  
Finches with delicate beaks for buds of trees,  
'And water-fowl that, in their age-longplash-  
ing  
At the lake's edge, had stretched the films of  
skin  
Between their claws to webs. Out through  
the reeds  
They rowed at last, and swam to seek their  
prey.  
He saw how, in their war against the world,  
Myriads of lives mysteriously assumed  
The hues that hid them best; the butterfly  
dancing  
With its four petals among so many flowers,  
Itself a wingèd flower; the hedgerow birds  
With greenish backs like leaves, but their soft  
breasts  
Light as a downy sky, so that the hawk,  
Poised overhead, sees only a vanishing leaf;  
Or, if he swoops along the field below  
them,  
Loses their silvery flight against the cloud.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

He saw the goldfinch, vivid as the blooms  
Through which it flutters, as though their  
dews had splashed

Red of the thistle upon its head and throat,  
And on its wings the dandelion's gold.

He saw the skylark coloured like its nest  
In the dry grass; the partridge, grey and  
brown

In mottled fields, escaping every eye,  
Till the foot stumbles over it, and the clump  
Of quiet earth takes wing and whirrs away.  
I saw him there, a strange and lonely soul,  
An eagle in the Swan of Lichfield's pen,  
Stretching clipped wings and staring at the  
sky.

He saw the multitudinous hosts of life,  
All creatures of the sea and earth and air,  
Ascending from one living spiral thread,  
Through tracts of time, unreckonable in  
years.

He saw them varying as the plastic clay  
Under the Sculptor's hands.

He saw them flowing  
From one Eternal Fount beyond our world,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

The inscrutable and indwelling Primal Power,  
His only *vera causa*; by whose will  
There was no gulf between the first and last.  
There was no break in that long line of law  
Between the first life drifting in the sea,  
And man, proud man, the crowning form of earth,  
Man whose own spine, the framework of his pride,  
The fern-stem of his life, trunk of his tree,  
Sleeps in the fish, the reptile, and the orang,  
As all those lives in his own embryo sleep.

What deeper revolution, then, must shake  
Those proud ancestral dynasties of earth?  
What little man-made temples must go down?  
And what august new temple must arise,  
One vast cathedral, gargoyleed with strange life,  
Surging through darkness, up to the unknown end?

## IV

### LAMARCK AND CUVIER: THE *VERA CAUSA*

FEAR nothing, Swan of Lichfield. Tuck thy head

Beneath thy snowy wing and sleep at ease.

Drift quietly on thy shadowy Minster Pool.

No voice comes yet to shake thy placid world.

Far off—in France—thy wingless angels make

Strange havoc, but the bearer of this fire,

The wise physician's unknown comrade, toils

Obscurely now, through his more perilous night,

Seeking his *vera causa*, with blind eyes.

Blind, blind as Galileo in his age,

Lamarck embraced his doom and, as in youth,

Held to the post assigned, till Life or Death

Relieved him. All those changes of the world

He had seen more clearly than his unknown friend;

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And traced their natural order.  
He saw the sea-gull like a flake of foam  
Tossed from the waves of that creative sea;  
The fish that like a speckled patch of sand  
Slides over sand upon its broad flat side,  
And twists its head until its nether eye  
Looks upward, too, and what swam upright  
once  
Is fixed in its new shape, and the wry mouth  
Grimaces like a gnome at its old foes.  
He saw the swarming mackerel shoals that  
swim  
Near the crisp surface, rippled with blue and  
green  
Round their dark backs to trick the pouncing  
gull,  
But silver-bellied to flash like streaks of light  
Over the ravenous mouths that from below  
Snap at the leaping gleams of the upper sea.  
And all these delicate artisries were wrought  
By that strange Something-Else which blind  
men call  
“Environment,” and the name is all their  
need;

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

A Something-Else that, through the sum of things,  
Labours unseen ; and, for its own strange ends,  
Desirous of more swiftness and more strength,  
Will teach the hunted deer to escape and fly,  
Even while it leads the tiger to pursue.

He saw that sexual war ; the stags that fought  
In mating-time ; the strong confirmed in power  
By victory. Lust and hunger, pleasure and pain,  
Like instruments in a dread Designer's hand,  
Lured or dissuaded, tempted and transformed.

He saw dark monsters in primeval forests  
Tearing the high green branches down for food  
Age after age, till from their ponderous heads  
Out of their own elastic flesh they stretched  
A trunk that, like a long grey muscular snake,  
Could curl up through the bunches of green leaves,  
And pluck their food at ease as cattle browse ;

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Life's own dark effort aiding that strange  
Power  
Without, and all controlled in one great  
plan,  
Grotesquely free, and beautifully at one  
With law, upsurging to the unknown end.  
All Nature like a vast chameleon changed;  
And all these forms of life through endless  
years,  
Changing, developing, from one filament rose.  
Man, on the heights, retravelled in nine moons  
All that long journey in little, never to lose  
What life had learned on its æonian way:  
Man on the heights; but not divided now  
From his own struggling kindred of the night.  
Few dared to think it yet and set him free  
Through knowledge of himself and his own  
power;  
Few, yet, in France or England. Let him  
bask  
Where in six days God set him at his ease  
Among His wingless angels; there to hate  
The truth, until he breaks his own vain heart  
And finds the law at last and walks with God,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Who, not abhorring even the mire and clay  
In the beginning, breathed His life through  
all.

This was his *vera causa*. Hate, contempt,  
Ridicule, like a scurrilous wind swooped  
down

From every side. Great Cuvier, with the  
friends

Of orthodoxy, sneered—could species change  
Their forms at will? Could the lean tiger's  
need

To crouch in hiding stripe his tawny flesh  
With shadows of the cane-break where he  
lay?

Could the giraffe, by wishing for the leaves  
Beyond his reach, add to his height one inch?  
Or could the reptile's fond desire to fly  
Create his wings?

Could Cuvier read one line  
Of this blind man, he might have held his  
peace,

Found his own *versa causa*, and sunk his  
pride;

And even the wiser Darwin, when he came,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Might have withheld his judgment for an hour,  
And learned from his forerunner. But, in their haste,  
They flung away his fire; and, as he fell,  
They set their heels upon it and stamped it out.  
Not always does the distant age restore  
The balance, or posterity renew  
The laurel on the cold dishonoured brow  
Unjustly robbed and blindly beaten down.  
He laboured on in blindness. At his side  
One faithful daughter, labouring with her pen,  
As he dictated, wrote, month after month,  
Year after year; and, when her father died,  
She saw him tossed into the general grave,  
The pauper's fosse, where none can trace him now,  
In Montparnasse, but wrapt in deeper peace  
Among the unknown and long-forgotten dead.

## VIII—IN GERMANY

GOETHE

### I

THE DISCOVERER

THE wreathing mist was quietly breathed away.

I stood upon a little hill at night;  
The tang of pinewoods and the warbling joy  
Of hidden brooks was round me.

The dark hill  
Sloped to a darker garden. On the crest  
A wooden cabin rose against the stars.  
Its open door, a gap of golden light  
In deep blue gloom, told me that he was there.  
I saw his darkened house asleep below,  
And Weimar clustering round it, a still cloud  
Of shadowy slumbering houses.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Like a shadow,  
Tracking the Sun-god to his midnight lair,  
I climbed to the lighted cabin on the crest,  
And I saw Goethe.

At his side a lamp  
On a rude table, out of tumbled waves  
Of manuscript, like an elfin lighthouse rose.  
His bed, a forester's couch for summer  
nights,  
Was thrust into a corner. Rows of books  
Lined the rough walls.

A letter was in his hand  
From Craigenputtock; and while he looked  
at it,  
The unuttered thoughts came flowing into the  
mind  
Of his invisible listener—Shadow-of-a-Leaf.  
All true, my friend; but there's no halfway  
house.  
Rid you of Houndsditch, and you'll not main-  
tain  
This quite ungodlike severance of mankind  
From Nature and its laws; though I should  
lose

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

My Scots apostle, if I called it so.  
What's an apostle? Is it one who sees  
Just so much of his hero, as reflects  
Himself and his own thoughts? I like him  
well,

And yet he makes me lonelier than before.  
Houndsditch may go; but Cuvier will go first;  
With all the rest who isolate mankind  
From its true place in Nature.

Everywhere

I saw the one remodulated form.  
The leaf ascended to mysterious bliss  
And was assumed, with happy sister-leaves,  
Into the heavenly glory of a flower.  
Pistil and stamen, calyx and bright crown  
Of coloured petals, all were leaves trans-  
formed,  
Transfigured, from one type.

I saw in man  
And his wild kinsfolk of the woods and seas,  
In fish and serpent, eagle and orang,  
One knotted spine that curled into a skull.  
It ran through all their patterns everywhere,  
Playing a thousand variants on one theme,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Branching through all the frame of fins and  
wings  
And spreading through their jointed hands  
and feet.

Throughout this infinite universe I heard  
The music of one law.

Is man alone  
Belied by all the signs of his ascent?  
Are men even now so far above the beasts?  
What can the tiger teach them when they kill?  
Are they so vain that they'd deny the bones  
An inch beneath their skin—bones that when  
stripped  
Of flesh and mixed with those of their dumb  
kin  
Themselves could not distinguish? How they  
clung  
To that distinction in the skull of man.  
It lacked the inter-maxillary. They grew  
angry  
When I foretold it would be found one day.  
What's truth to a poet? Back to your dainty  
lies!

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

And then—one day—I found it.

Did they say  
Strange work for a poet? Is mankind asleep  
That it can never feel what then I felt,  
To find my faith so quietly confirmed?  
I held it in my hand and stared at it,  
An eyeless hollow skull that once could think  
Its own strange thoughts and stare as well as  
we;  
A skull that once was rocked upon a breast,  
And looked its deathless love through dying  
eyes;  
And, in that skull, above the incisor teeth,  
The signs that men denied,—of its ascent  
Through endless ages, in the savage night  
Of jungle-worlds, before mankind was born.

No thought for poets, and no wonder there?  
No gateway to the kingdoms of the mind?  
No miracle in the miracle that I saw  
Touched, held.

My body tingled. All my veins  
Froze with the inconceivable mystery,  
The weirdness and the wonder of it all.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

No vision? And no dream? Let poets play  
At bowls with Yorick's relic then, for ever;  
Or blow dream-bubbles. I've a world to  
shape;  
A law to guide me, and a God to find.

That night in sleep I saw—it was no dream!—  
It was too wild, too strange, too darkly true,  
And all too human in its monstrous pangs  
To be a dream. I saw it, and I live.  
I saw, I saw, and closed these eyes to see  
That terrible birth in darkness, the black  
night  
Of naked agony that first woke the soul.

Night and the jungle, burning with great  
stars,  
Rolled all around me. There were steaming  
pools  
Of darkness, and the smell of the wild beast  
Musky and acrid on the blood-warm air.  
The night was like a tiger's hot sweet mouth;  
I heard a muffled roar, and a wild cry,  
A shriek, a fall.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

I saw an uncouth form,  
Matted with hair, stretched on the blood-  
stained earth;  
And, in the darkness, darker than the night,  
Another form uncouth, with matted hair,  
Long-armed, like a gorilla, stooping low  
Above his mate.

She did not move or breathe.  
He felt her body with his long-clawed hands,  
And called to her—a harsh, quick, startled  
cry.

She did not hear. One arm was tightly wound  
About her little one. Both were strangely  
still,  
Stiller than sleep.

He squatted down to wait.  
They did not move all night. At dawn he  
stood

By that stiff mockery. He stretched up his  
arms  
And clutched at the red sun that mocked him,  
too.

Then, out of his blind heart, with one fierce  
pang,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

The man-child, Grief, was born.

His round dark eyes  
Pricked with strange brine, and his broad  
twitching mouth

Quivered. He fell on the dark unanswering  
earth

Beside his dead, with inarticulate cries,  
Great gasping sobs that seemed to rend his  
flesh

And shook him through and through.

The night returned and, with the night, a  
hope,

Because he could not see their staring eyes.  
He rushed into the jungle and returned  
With fruits and berries, ripe and soft and red.  
He rubbed the dark wet plums against their  
lips.

He smeared the juices on their locked white  
teeth;

Pleading with little murmurs, while the stars  
Wheeled overhead, and velvet-footed beasts  
Approached and stared with eyes of gold and  
green;

And even the little leaves were all alive;

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

And tree-toads chirruped; but those dark forms lay still.

Day followed night. He did not know them now.

All that had been so swift to answer him Was gone. But whither? Every day he saw A ball of light arising in the East And moving overhead the self-same way Into the West. . . .

The strange new hunger eating at his heart Urged him to follow it, stumbling blindly on Through endless forests; but it moved so swiftly

He could not overtake it, could not reach The place where it went down, ere darkness came.

Then—in the dark—a shadow sometimes moved

Before him, like the shadow he had lost, And with a cry, *Yoo! Yoo!* he would awake And, crashing through the forests to the West, Would try to steal a march upon the sun, And see it rise inexorably behind him,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And sail above, inexorably, at noon,  
And sink beyond, inexorably, at night.

Then, after many suns had risen and set,  
He saw at dusk a blaze of crimson light  
Between the thinning tree-trunks and emerged  
Out of the forest into a place of rocks,  
Washed by a water greater than the world.  
He stood, an uncouth image carved in stone,  
Staring into the West. He saw the sun  
Staining the clouds and sinking into the flood.  
His lips were parched with thirst, a deeper  
thirst

Than any spring on earth could quench again;  
And when he laid him down upon the shore  
To drink of that deep water, he knew well  
That he was nearer now to what he sought,  
Because it tasted salt as his lost tears.

He drank. He waded out, and drank again.  
Then a big wave of darkness rushed upon  
him,  
And rolled him under. He rose, and with  
great arms

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Swam out into that boundless flood of brine  
Towards the last glimmer of light; a dark,  
    blind brute,

Sobbing and panting, till the merciful waves,  
Salt in his eyes and salt upon his lips,  
Had drawn the agony out of his labouring  
    limbs

And gently as the cradling boughs that once  
Rocked him to sleep, embraced and drew him  
    down

Into oblivion, the first life that caught  
With eyes bewildered by the light they knew,  
A glimpse of the unknown light beyond the  
    world.

GOETHE

II

THE PROPHET

BEFORE the first wild matins of the thrush  
Had ended, or the sun sucked up the dew,  
I saw him wrestling with his thoughts. He  
rose,  
Laid down that eagle's feather in his hand,  
And looked at his own dawn.

He did not speak.

Only the secret music of his mind  
In an enchanted silence flowed to meet  
The listener, as his own great morning flowed  
Through those Æolian pinewoods at his feet.  
Colours and forms of earth and heaven you  
flow

Like clouds around a star—the streaming robe  
Of an Eternal Glory. Let the law  
Of Beauty, in your rhythmic folds, by night  
And day, through all the universe, reveal  
The way of the unseen Mover to these eyes.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Last night I groped into the dark abyss  
Under the feet of man, and saw Thee there  
Ascending, from that depth below all depth.  
O, now, at dawn, as I look up to heaven  
Descend to meet me, on my upward way.  
How shall they grasp Thy glory who despise  
The law that is Thy kingdom here on earth,  
Our way of freedom and our path to Thee?  
How shall they grasp that law, or rightly  
know  
One truth in Nature, who deny Thy Power,  
Unresting and unhasting, everywhere?  
How shall the seekers, bound to their own  
tasks,  
Each following his own quest, each spying out  
His fragment of a truth, reintegrate  
Their universe and behold all things in one?  
Be this the task of Song, then, to renew  
That universal vision in the soul.  
Rise, poet, to thy universal height,  
Then stoop, as eagles do from their wide  
heaven  
On their particular prey. Between the clouds  
They see more widely and truly than the mole

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

At work in his dark tunnel, though he cast  
His earth upon the fields they watch afar.  
Work on, inductive mole; but there's a use  
In that too lightly abandoned way of thought,  
The way of Plato, and the way of Christ,  
That man must find again, ere he can build  
The temple of true knowledge. Those who  
trust

To Verulam's *Novum Organum* alone,  
Never can build it. Quarriers of the truth,  
They cut the stones, but cannot truly lay them;  
For only he whose deep remembering mind  
Holds the white archetype, can to music build  
His towers, from the pure pattern imprinted  
there.

He, and he only, in one timeless flash  
Through all this moving universe discerns  
The inexorable sequences of law,  
'And, in the self-same flash, transfiguring  
all,  
Uniting and transcending all, beholds  
With my Spinoza's own ecstatic eyes  
God in the hidden law that fools call  
"chance,"

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

God in the star, the flower, the moondrawn  
wave,  
God in the snake, the bird, and the wild beast,  
God in that long ascension from the dark,  
God in the body and in the soul of man,  
God uttering life, and God receiving death.



## IX—IN ENGLAND

### DARWIN

#### I

### CHANCE AND DESIGN

*“I AM the whisper that he ceased to hear,”*  
*The quiet voice of Shadow-of-a-Leaf*  
*began;*  
*And, as he spoke, the flowing air before me*  
*Shone like a crystal sphere, wherein I saw*  
*All that he pictured, through his own deep*  
*eyes.*

I waited in his garden there, at Down.  
I peered between the crooklights of a hedge  
Where ragged robins grew.

Far off, I heard  
The clocklike rhythm of an ironshod staff  
Clicking on gravel, clanking on a flint.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Then, round the sand-walk, under his trees he strode,  
A tall lean man, wrapt in a loose dark cloak,  
His big soft hat of battered sun-burnt straw  
Pulled down to shade his face. But I could see,  
For I looked upward, the dim brooding weight  
Of silent thought that soon would shake the world.

He paused to watch an ant upon its way.  
He bared his head. I saw the shaggy brows  
That like a mountain-fortress overhung  
The deep veracious eyes, the dogged face  
Where kindness and patience, knowledge,  
power,  
And pain quiescent under the conquering will,  
In that profound simplicity which marks  
The stature of the mind, the truth of art,  
The majesty of every natural law.  
The child's wise innocence, and the silent worth

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Of human grief and love, had set their seal.

I stole behind him, and he did not hear  
Or see me. I was only Shadow-of-a-Leaf;  
And yet—I knew the word was on its way  
That might annul his life-work in an hour.  
I heard the whisper of every passing wing  
Where, wrapt in peace, among the hills of  
Kent,

The patient watchful intellect had prepared  
A mightier revolution for mankind  
Even than the world-change of Copernicus  
When the great central earth began to move  
And dwine to a grain of dust among the stars.  
I saw him pondering over a light-winged seed  
That floated, like an elfin aeronaut,  
Across the path. He caught it in his hand  
And looked at it. He touched its delicate  
hooks

And set it afloat again. He watched it sailing,  
Carrying its tiny freight of life away  
Over the quick-set hedge, up, into the hills.  
I heard him muttering, "beautiful! Surely  
this

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Implies design!

Design?" Then, from his face  
The wonder faded, and he shook his head;  
But with such reverence and humility  
That his denial almost seemed a prayer.

A prayer—for, not long after, in his house,  
I saw him bowed, the first mind of his age,  
Bowed, helpless, by the deathbed of his child;  
Pondering, with all that knowledge, all that  
power,

Powerless, and ignorant of the means to save;  
A dumb Prometheus, bending his great head  
In silence, as he drank those broken words  
Of thanks, the pitiful thanks of small parched  
lips,

For a sip of water, a smile, a cooling hand  
On the hot brow; thanks for his goodness—  
God!

Thanks from a dying child, just ten years old!

And, while he stood in silence by her grave,  
Hearing the ropes creak as they lowered her  
down

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Into the cold dark hollow, while he breathed  
The smell of the moist earth, those calm  
strange words—

*I am the Resurrection and the Life,*  
Echoed and echoed through his lonely  
mind,  
Only to deepen his agony of farewell  
Into Eternity.

Dumbly there he strove  
To understand how accents so divine,  
In words so worthy of eternal power,  
So postulant of it in their calm majesty,  
Could breathe through mortal lips.

Madman or God,  
Who else could say them?

God it could not be,  
If in his mortal blindness he saw clear;  
And yet, and yet, could madness wring the  
heart  
Thus, thus, and thus, for nineteen hundred  
years?

*Would that she knew, would God that she  
knew now,  
How much we loved her!*

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

The blind world, still ruled  
By shams, and following in hypnotic flocks  
The sheep-bell of an hour, still thought of  
him

“The Man of Science” as less or more than  
man,

Coldly aloof from love and grief and pain;  
Held that he knew far more, and felt far less  
Than other men, and, even while it praised  
The babblers for their reticence and their  
strength,

The shallow for their depth, the blind for  
sight,

The rattling weathercocks for their love of  
truth,

Ere long would brand, as an irreverent fool,  
This great dumb simple man, with his bowed  
head.

Could the throng see that drama, as I saw it—  
I, Shadow-of-a-Leaf,—could the blind throng  
discern

The true gigantic drama of those hours  
Among the quiet hills as, one by one,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

His facts fell into place; their broken edges  
Joined, like the fragments of a vast mosaic,  
And, slowly, the new picture of the world,  
Emerging in majestic pageantry  
Out of the primal dark, before him grew;  
Grew by its own inevitable law;  
Grew, and earth's ancient fantasies dwindled  
down;  
The stately fabric of the old creation  
Crumbled away; while man, proud demi-  
god,  
Stripped of all arrogance now, priest, beggar,  
king,  
Captive and conqueror, all must own alike  
Their ancient lineage. Kin to the dumb  
beasts  
By the red life that flowed through all their  
veins  
From hearts of the same shape, beating all as  
one  
In man and brute; kin, by those kindred  
forms  
Of flesh and bone, with eyes and ears and  
mouths

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

That saw and heard and hungered like his  
own,  
His mother Earth reclaimed him.

Back and back,  
He traced them, till the last faint clue died  
out  
In lifeless earth and sea.

I watched him striving  
To follow further, bending his great brows  
Over the intense lens. . . .

Far off, I heard  
The murmur of human life, laughter and  
weeping;  
Heard the choked sobs by a million  
graves,  
And saw a million faces, wrung with grief,  
Lifted forlornly to the Inscrutable Power.

I saw him raise his head. I heard his thought  
As others hear a whisper—*Surely this  
Implies design!*

And worlds on aching worlds  
Of dying hope were wrapped in those four  
words.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

He stared before him, wellnigh overwhelmed  
For one brief moment, with instinctive awe  
Of Something that . . . determined every  
    force  
Directed every atom. . . .

Then, in a flash,  
The indwelling vision vanished at the voice  
Of his own blindfold reason. For what  
    mind  
Could so unravel the complicated threads,  
The causes that are caused by the effects  
Of other causes, intricately involved,  
Woven and interwoven, in endless mazes,  
Wandering through infinite time, infinite  
    space,  
And yet, an ordered and mysterious whole,  
Before whose very being all mortal power  
Must abdicate its sovereignty?

A dog  
Might sooner hope to leap beyond the mind  
Of Newton than a man might hope to  
    grasp  
Even in this little whirl of earth and sun  
The Scheme of the All-determining Absolute.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And yet—if that—the All-moving, were the  
One

Reality, and sustained and made all forms,  
Then, by the self-same power in man himself  
Whatever was real in man might understand  
That same Reality, being one substance with  
it,

One substance with the essential Soul of all,—  
Might understand, as children understand,  
Even in ignorance, those who love them best;  
Might recognise, as through their innocent  
eyes,

The highest, which is Love, though all the  
worlds

Of lesser knowledge passed unheeded by.  
What meant those moments else? Moments  
that came

And went on wings, wild as these wings of  
mine,

The wings of Shadow-of-a-Leaf,  
Quick with a light that never could be  
reached

By toiling up the mountain-sides of thought;  
Consummate meanings that were never found

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

By adding units; moments of strange awe  
When that majestic sequence of events  
We call the cosmos, from its wheeling atoms  
Up to its wheeling suns, all spoke one Power,  
One Presence, One Unknowable, and One  
Known?

*In the beginning God made heaven and earth:*

He, too, believed it, once. . . .

## II

### THE VOYAGE

As if the wings  
Of Shadow-of-a-Leaf had borne me through  
the West  
So that the sunset changed into the dawn,  
I saw him in his youth.

The large salt wind,  
The creak of cordage, the wild swash of waves  
Were round him as he paced the clear white  
deck,  
An odd loose-tweeded sojourner, in a world  
Of uniforms and guns.

The *Beagle* plunged  
Westward, upon the road that Drake had  
sailed;  
But this new voyager, on a longer quest,  
Sailed on a stranger sea; and, though I heard  
His ringing laugh, he seemed to live apart  
In his own mind, from all who moved around  
him.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

I saw him while the *Beagle* basked at anchor  
Under West Indian palms. He lounged there,  
tanned

With sun; tall, lankier in his cool white drill;  
The big slouched straw pulled down to shade  
his eyes.

The stirring wharf was one bright haze of  
colour;

Kaleidoscopic flakes, orange and green,  
Blood-red and opal, glancing to and fro,  
Through purple shadows. The warm air  
smelt of fruit.

He leaned his elbows on the butt of a gun  
And listened, while a red-faced officer,  
breathing

Faint whiffs of rum, expounded lazily,  
With loosely stumbling tongue, the cynic's  
code

His easy rule of life, belying the creed  
That both professed.

And, in one flash, I caught  
A glimpse of something deeper, missed by  
both,—

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

The subtle touch of the Master-Ironist  
Unfolding his world-drama, point by point,  
In every sight and sound and word and  
thought,  
Packed with significance.

Out of its myriad scenes  
All moving swiftly on, unguessed by man,  
To close in one great climax of clear light,  
This vivid moment flashed.

The cynic ceased;  
And Darwin, slowly knitting his puzzled  
brows,  
Answered, "*But it is wrong!*"  
"Wrong?" chuckled the other. "Why should  
it be wrong?"  
And Darwin, Darwin,—he that was to grasp  
The crumbling pillars of their infidel Temple  
And bring them headlong down to the honest  
earth,  
Answered again, naïvely as a child,  
"*Does not the Bible say so?*"

A broad grin  
Wreathed the red face that stared into his  
own;

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

And, later, when the wardroom heard the jest,

The same wide grin from Christian mouth to mouth

Spread like the ripples on a single pool

Quietly enough! They liked him. They'd not hurt him!

And Darwin, strange, observant, simple soul, Saw clearly enough; had eyes behind his back For every smile; though in his big slow mind

He now revolved a thought that greatly puzzled him,

A thought that, in their light sophistification, These humorists had not guessed.

Once, in his cabin,  
His red-faced cynic had picked up a book  
By one whose life was like a constant light  
On the high altar of Truth.

He had read a page,  
Then flung it down, with a contemptuous oath,  
Muttering, "These damned atheists! Why d'you read them?"

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Could pagan minds be stirred, then, to such  
wrath  
Because the man they called an “atheist”  
smiled  
At dates assigned by bland ecclesiasts  
To God for His creation?

*Man was made  
On March the ninth, at ten o’clock in the  
morning  
(A Tuesday), just six thousand years ago:  
A legend of a somewhat different cast  
From that deep music of the first great  
phrase  
In *Genesis*. The strange irony here struck  
home.  
For Darwin, here, was with the soul-bowed  
throng  
Of prophets, while the ecclesiasts blandly  
toyed  
With little calendars, which his “atheist’s  
book,”  
In its irreverence, whispered quite away;  
Whispered (for all such atheists bend their  
heads*

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Doubtless in shame) that, in the Book of Earth,

Six thousand years were but as yesterday,  
A flying cloud, a shadow, a breaking wave.  
Million of years were written upon the rocks  
That told its history. To upheave one range  
Of mountains, out of the sea that had sub-  
merged

So many a continent, ere mankind was born,  
The harnessed forces, governed all by law,  
Had laboured, dragging down and building  
up,

Through distances of Time, unthinkable  
As those of starry space.

It dared to say  
(This book so empty of mystery and awe!)  
That, searching the dark scripture of the  
rocks,  
It found therein no sign of a beginning,  
No prospect of an end.

Strange that the Truth,  
Whether upheld by the pure law within  
Or by the power of reason, thus dismayed  
These worshippers of a little man-made code.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Alone there in his cabin, with the books  
Of Humboldt, Lyell, Herschel, spread before  
him.

He made his great decision.

If the realm  
Beyond the bounds of human knowledge gave  
So large a sanctuary to mortal lies,  
Henceforth his Bible should be one inscribed  
Directly with the law—the Book of Earth.

### III

#### THE TESTIMONY OF THE ROCKS

I saw him climbing like a small dark speck  
—Fraught with what vast significance to the  
world—

Among the snow-capt Andes, a dark point  
Of travelling thought, alone upon the heights,  
To watch the terrible craters as they breathed  
Their smouldering wrath against the sky.

I saw him,  
Pausing above Portillo's pass to hear  
The sea-like tumult, where brown torrents  
rolled

Innumerable thousands of rough stones,  
Jarring together, and hurrying all one way.  
He stood there, spellbound, listening to the  
voice

Of Time itself, the moments hurrying by  
For ever irrecoverably. I heard  
His very thought. The stones were on their  
way

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

To the ocean that had made them; every note  
In their wild music was a prophecy  
Of continents unborn.

When he had seen  
Those continents in embryo, beds of sand  
And shingle, cumulant on the coastwise  
plains,  
Thousands of feet in thickness, he had  
doubted  
Whether the river of time itself could grind  
And pile such masses there. But when he  
heard  
The mountain-torrents rattling, he recalled  
How races had been born and passed away,  
And night and day, through years unreckon-  
able,  
These grinding stones had never ceased to  
roll  
On their steep course. Not even the Cordil-  
leras,  
Had they been ribbed with adamant, could  
withstand  
That slow sure waste. Even those majestic  
heights

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Would vanish. Nothing—not the wind that  
blows  
Was more unstable than the crust of the earth.

He landed at Valdivia, on the day  
When the great earthquake shuddered  
through the hills

From Valparaiso, southward to Cape Horn.  
I saw him wandering through a ruined city  
Of Paraguay, and measuring on the coast  
The upheaval of new land, discovering rocks  
Ten feet above high-water, rocks with shells  
For which the dark-eyed panic-stricken  
throng

Had dived at ebb, a few short days ago.  
I saw him—strange discoverer—as he sailed  
Through isles, not only uncharted, but new-  
born,

Isles newly arisen and glistening in the sun,  
And atolls where he thought an older height  
Had sunk below the smooth Pacific sea.

He explored the Pampas; and before him  
passed

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

The centuries that had made them; the great streams

Gathering the red earth at their estuaries  
In soft rich deltas, till new plains of loam  
Over the Banda granite slowly spread,  
And seeds took root and mightier forests tow-  
ered,

Forests that human foot could never tread,  
Forests that human eye could never see;  
But by the all-conquering human mind at last  
Trodden and seen, waving their leaves in air  
As at an incantation,  
And filled once more with monstrous forms  
of life.

He found their monstrous bones embedded  
there,  
And, as he found them, all those dry bones  
lived.

I stole beside him in the dark, and heard,  
In the unfathomable forest deeps, the crash  
Of distant boughs, a wild and lonely sound,  
Where Megatherium, the gigantic Sloth  
Whose thigh was thrice an elephant's in girth,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Rose, blindly groping, and with armoured  
hands

Tore down the trees to reach their tender  
crests

And strip them of their more delicious green.

I saw him pondering on the secret bond

Between the living creatures that he found

On the main coast, and those on lonely isles;

Forms that diverged, and yet were closely  
akin.

One key, one only, unlocked the mystery there.

Unless God made, for every separate isle

As it arose, new tribes of plants, birds, beasts,

In variant images of the tribes He set

Upon their nearest continent, grading all

By time, and place, and distance from the  
shore,

The bond between them was the bond of  
blood.

All, all had branched from one original tree.

I saw him off the Patagonian coast

Staring at something stranger than a dream.

There, on a rocky point above the ship

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

With its world-voyaging thoughts, he first beheld

Primeval man. There, clustering on the crags,  
Backed by their echoing forests of dark beech,  
The naked savages yelled at the white sails,  
Like wolves that bay the moon. They tossed  
their arms

Wildly through their long manes of streaming hair,

Like troubled spirits from an alien world.

Whence had they risen? From what ancestral night?

What bond of blood was there? What dreadful Power

Begot them—fallen or risen—from heaven or hell?

I saw him hunting everywhere for light  
On life's dark mystery; gathering everywhere  
Armies of fact, that pointed all one way,  
And yet—what *vera causa* could he find  
In blindfold Nature?

Even had he found it,  
What æons would be needed! Earth was old;

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

But could the unresting loom of infinite time  
Weave this wild miracle, or evolve one nerve  
Of all this intricate network in the brain,  
This exquisite machine that looked through  
heaven,  
Revelled in colours of a sunset sky,  
Or met love's eyes on earth?

Everywhere, now,  
He found new clues that led him all one way.  
And, everywhere, in the record of the rocks,  
Time and to spare for all that Time could do,  
But not his *vera causa*.

Earth grew strange.  
Even in the ghostly gleam that told the watch  
One daybreak that the ship was nearing home  
He saw those endless distances again. . . .  
He saw through mist, over the struggling  
waves  
That run between the white-chalk cliffs of  
France  
And England, sundered coasts that once were  
joined  
And clothed with one wide forest.

The deep sea

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Had made the strange white body of that  
broad land,

Beautifully establishing it on death,  
Building it, inch by inch, through endless  
years

Out of innumerable little gleaming bones,  
The midget skeletons of the twinkling tribes  
That swarmed above in the more lucid green  
Ten thousand fathoms nearer to the sun.

There they lived out their gleam of life and  
died,

Then slowly drifted down into the dark,  
And spread in layers upon the cold sea-bed  
The invisible grains and flakes that were their  
bones.

Layer on layer of flakes and grains of lime,  
Where life could never build, they built it up  
By their incessant death. Though but an inch  
In every thousand years, they built it up,  
Inch upon inch, age after endless age;  
And the dark weight of the incumbent Deep  
Compressed them (Power determined by  
what Will?)

Out of the night that dim creation rose

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

The seas withdrew. The bright new land appeared.

Then Gaul and Albion, nameless yet, were one;

And the wind brought a myriad wingèd seeds,  
And the birds carried them, and the forests  
grew,

And through their tangled ways the tall elk  
roared.

But sun and frost and rain, the grinding  
streams

And rhythmic tides (the tools of what dread  
Hand?)

Still laboured on; till, after many a change,  
The great moon-harnessed energies of the  
sea

Came swinging back, the way of the southwest  
wind,

And, æon after æon, hammering there,  
Rechannelled through that land their shining  
way.

There all those little bones now greet the sun  
In gleaming cliffs of chalk; and, in their  
chines

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

The chattering jackdaw builds, while overhead  
On the soft mantle of turf the violet wakes  
In March, and young-eyed lovers look for Spring.  
What of the Cause? O, no more rounded creeds  
Framed in a realm where no man could refute them!  
Honesty, honesty, honesty, first of all.  
And so he turned upon the world around him,  
The same grave eyes of deep simplicity  
With which he had faced his pagan-christian friends  
And quoted them their Bible. . . .  
Slowly he marshalled his worldwide hosts of fact,  
Legions new-found, or first assembled now,  
In their due order. Lyell had not dared  
To tell the truth he knew. He found in earth  
The records of its vanished worlds of life,  
Each with its own strange forms, in its own age,  
Sealed in its own rock-system.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

In the first,  
The rocks congealed from fire, no sign of life;  
And, through the rest, in order as they were  
made,  
From oldest up to youngest, first the signs  
Of life's first gropings; then, in gathering  
power,  
Strange fishes, lizards, birds, and uncouth  
beasts,  
Worlds of strange life, but all in ordered  
grades,  
World over world, each tombed in its own age  
Or merging into the next with subtle changes,  
Delicate modulations of one form,  
(Urged by what force? Impelled by what  
dark power?)  
Progressing upward, into subtler forms  
Through all the buried strata, till there came  
Forms that still live, still fight for life on  
earth,  
Tiger and wolf and ape; and, last of all,  
The form of man; the child of yesterday.  
Of yesterday! For none had ever found  
Among the myriad forms of older worlds,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Locked in those older rocks through tracts of time

Out-spanning thought, one vestige of mankind.

There was no human footprint on the shores  
Whose old compacted sand, now turned to stone,

Still showed the ripples where a summer sea

Once whispered, ere the mastodon was born.  
There were the pitted marks, all driven one way,

That showed how raindrops fell, and the west wind blew.

There on the naked stone remained the tracks  
Where first the sea-beasts crawled out of the sea,

A few salt yards upon the long dark trail  
That led through æons to the tidal roar  
Of lighted cities and this world of tears.

The shell, the fern, the bird's foot, the beast's claw,

Had left their myriad signs. Their forms remained,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Their delicate whorls, their branching fronds,  
their bones,  
Age after age, like jewels in the rocks;  
But, till the dawning of an age so late,  
It seemed like yesterday, no sign, no trace,  
No relic of mankind!

Then, in that age  
Among the skulls, made equal in the grave,  
Of ape and wolf, last of them all, looked up  
That naked shrine with its receding brows,  
And its two sightless holes, the skull of man.  
Round it, his tools and weapons, the chipped  
flints,  
The first beginnings of his fight for power,  
The first results of his first groping thought  
Proclaimed his birth, the youngest child of  
time.

*Born, and not made?* Born—of what lesser  
life?

Was man so arrogant that he could disdain  
The words he used so glibly of his God—  
*Born, and not made?*

Could Lyell, who believed  
That, in the world around us, we should find

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

The self-same causes and the self-same laws  
To-day as yesterday; and throughout all time;  
And that the Power behind all changes works  
By law alone; law that includes all heights,  
All depths, of reason, harmony, and love;  
Could Lyell hold that all those realms of life,  
Each sealed apart in its own separate age,  
With its own separate species, had been called  
Suddenly, by a special Act of God,  
Out of the void and formless? Could he think  
Even that mankind, this last emergent form,  
After so many æons of ordered law,  
Was by miraculous Hands in one wild hour,  
Suddenly kneaded out of the formless clay?  
And was the formless clay more noble, then,  
Than this that breathed, this that had eyes to  
see,  
This whose dark heart could beat, this that  
could die?  
No! Lyell knew that this wild house of flesh  
Was never made by hands, not even those  
Hands;  
And that to think so were to discrown God,  
And not to crown Him, as the blind believed.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

The miracle was a vaster than they knew.  
The law by which He worked was all un-  
known;  
Subtler than music, quieter than light,  
The mighty process that through countless  
changes,  
Delicate grades and tones and semi-tones,  
Out of the formless slowly brought forth  
forms,  
Lifeless as crystals, or translucent globes  
Drifting in water; till, through endless years,  
Out of their myriad changes, one or two  
More subtle in combination, at the touch  
Of light began to move, began to attract  
Substances that could feed them; blindly at  
first;  
But as an artist, with all heaven for prize,  
Pores over every syllable, tests each thread  
Of his most tenuous thought, the moving  
Power  
Spent endless æons of that which men call  
Time,  
To form one floating tendril that could close  
On what it touched.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Who whispered in his ear  
That fleeting thought?

We must suppose a Power  
Intently watching—through all the universe—  
Each slightest variant, seizing on the best,  
Selecting them, as men by conscious choice  
In their small realm selected and reshaped  
Their birds and flowers.

We must suppose a Power  
In that immense night-cleaving pageantry  
Which men call Nature, a selective Power,  
Choosing through æons as men choose  
through years.

*Many are called, few chosen,* quietly breathed  
Shadow-of-a-Leaf, in exquisite undertone  
One phrase of the secret music. . . .

He did not hear.  
Lamarck—all too impatiently he flung  
Lamarck aside; forgetting how in days  
When the dark Book of Earth was darker yet  
Lamarck had spelled gigantic secrets out,  
And left an easier task for the age to come;  
Forgetting more than this; for Darwin's mind,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Working at ease in Nature, lost its way  
In history, and the thoughts of other men.  
For him Lamarck had failed, and he misread  
His own forerunner's mind. Blindfold de-  
sires  
Had never shaped a wing. The grapevine's  
need  
To cling and climb could thrust no tendrils  
out.  
The environing snows of Greenland could not  
cloak  
Its little foxes with their whiter fur.  
Nor could the wing-shut butterfly's inner will  
Mimic the shrivelled leaf on the withered  
bough  
So cunningly that the bird might perch beside  
it  
And never see its prey.

Was it blind chance  
That flashed his own great fragment of the  
truth  
Into his mind? What *vera causa*, then,  
What leap of Nature brought that truth to  
birth,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Illumining all the world?

It flashed upon him  
As at a sudden contact of two wires  
The current flashes through; or, when through  
space,  
A meteorite for endless ages rolls  
In darkness, and its world of night appears  
Unchangeable for ever, till, all at once,  
It plunges into a soft resisting sea  
Of planet-girdling air, and burns with heat,  
And bursts into a blaze, while far below,  
Two lovers, in a world beyond its ken,  
Look from a little window into the night  
And see a falling star.

By such wild light,  
An image of his own ambiguous "chance,"  
Which was not "chance," but governed by a  
law  
Unknown, too vast for men to comprehend  
(Too vast for any to comprehend but One,  
Breathed Shadow-of-a-Leaf, who in each part  
discerns  
Its harmony with the whole), at last the clue  
Flashed on him. . . .

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

In the strange ironical scheme  
Wherein he moved, of the Master-Dramatist,  
It was his own ambiguous “chance” that slipt  
A book of Malthus into his drowsy hand  
And drew his drowsy eyes down to that law  
Of struggling men and nations.

Was it “chance”  
That in this intricate torch-race tossed him  
there  
Light from one struggling on an alien track  
And yet not alien, since all roads to truth  
Meet in one goal at last?

Was it blind chance  
That even in this triumphant flash prepared  
The downfall of his human pride, and slipt  
The self-same volume into another hand;  
And, in the lonely islands of Malay,  
Drew Wallace to the self-same page, and said  
—Though only Shadow-of-a-Leaf could hear  
that voice,—  
*Whose is the kingdom, whose the glory and  
power?*

O, exquisite irony of the Master, there

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Unseen by both, their generous rivalry  
Evolved, perfected, the new thought for man;  
And, over both, and all their thoughts, a  
Power

Intently watching, made of their struggle for  
truth

An image of the law that they illumed.

So all that wasting of a myriad seeds  
In Nature's wild profusion was not waste,  
Not even such waste as drives the flying grains  
Under the sculptor's chisel, but was itself  
A cause of that unending struggle of life  
Through which all life ascends.

The conqueror there  
Was chosen by laws inexorably precise,  
As though to infinite Reason infinite Art  
Were wedded, and had found in infinite  
“chance”

Full scope for their consummate certainties,—  
Choice and caprice, freedom and law in one.  
Each slightest variant, in a myriad ways,  
That armed or shielded or could help its kind,  
Would lead to a new triumph; would reveal,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

In varying, subtler ways of varying still;  
New strokes of that divinest “chance” of all  
Which poet and sculptor count as unforeseen,  
And unforeseeable; yet, when once achieved,  
They recognise as crowning law with law,  
And witnessing to infinitudes of Power  
In that creative Will which shapes the world.  
O, in that widening splendour of the mind,  
Blinder than Buffon, blinder than Lamarck,  
His eyes amazed with all that leapt to light,  
Dazed with a myriad details, lost the whole.  
He saw the law whereby the few were chosen  
From forms already at variance. Back and  
    back

He traced his law, and every step was true.  
And yet his *vera causa* was no Cause,  
For it determined nothing. It revealed,  
In part, how subtler variants had arisen  
From earliest simpler variants, but no more.

\*     \*     \*     \*     \*

Subtler than music, quieter than light,  
The Power that wrought those changes; and  
    the last  
Were all implied and folded in the first,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

As the gnarled oak-tree with its thousand  
boughs

Writhing to heaven and striking its grim roots  
Like monstrous talons into the mountain's  
heart

Is pent in one smooth acorn. So each life,  
In little, retold the tale; each separate man  
Was, in himself, the world's epitome,  
A microcosm, wherein who runs may read  
The history of the whole; from the first seed  
Enclosed in the blind womb, until life wake  
Through moons or æons of embryonic change  
To human thought and love, and those desires  
Which still grope upward, into the unknown  
realms

As far beyond us now as Europe lay  
From the first life that crawled out of the sea.

There lies our hope; but O, the endless way!  
And the lost road of knowledge, endless, too!  
That infinite hope was not for him. One life  
Hardly sufficed for his appointed task,  
To find on earth his clues to the unknown law,  
Out-miracling all miracles had he known,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Whereby this lifeless earth, so clearly seen  
Across the abyss of time, this lifeless earth  
Washed by a lifeless ocean, by no power  
But that which moves within the things we  
see,

Swept the blind rocks into the cities of men,  
With great cathedrals towering to the sky,  
And little ant-like swarms in their dark aisles  
Kneeling to that Unknowable.

His to trace

The way by inches, never to see the whole,  
Never to grasp the miracle in the law,  
And wrestling with it, to be written by light  
As by an Angel's finger in the dark.  
Could he have stood on that first lifeless coast  
With Shadow-of-a-Leaf, and seen that lifeless  
brine,

Rocks where no mollusc clung, nor seaweed  
grew;

Could he have heard a whisper,—*Only wait.*  
*Be patient. On one sure and certain day,*  
*Out of the natural changes of these rocks*  
*And seas, at last, a great ship will go by;*  
*Cities will dusk that heaven; and you shall see*

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

*Two lovers pass, reading one printed book,  
The Paradiso. . . .*

Would he have been so sure  
That Nature had no miracles in her heart  
More inconceivably shattering to the mind  
Than madness ever dreamed? For this, this,  
    this,  
Had happened, though the part obscured the  
    whole;  
And his own labour, in a myriad ways,  
Endlessly linking part to part, had lost  
The *vera causa* that Lamarck had known,  
The one determining Cause that moved  
    through all.

## IV

### THE PROTAGONISTS

THE mist cleared. As an airman flying, I  
saw,  
Between the quiet wings of Shadow-of-a-  
Leaf,  
Far down, a coiling glitter of willowy  
streams,  
Then grey remembered battlements that en-  
closed  
Gardens, like nests of nightingales; a bridge;  
An airy tower; a shadowy dome; the High;  
St Mary's delicate spire.

A sound of bells  
Rose like a spray of melody from the far  
Diminished fountains of the City of Youth.  
I heard and almost wept.

The walls grew large  
And soared to meet me. As the patterned  
streets

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Break into new dimensions, passing from sight  
While the airman glides and circles down,  
    they rose,  
And the outer City, vanishing, revealed  
The secret life within. At once I passed  
Through walls of stone on those ethereal  
    wings;  
And, as an unseen spirit might survey  
A crowded theatre from above, I saw  
A packed assembly, gazing, hushed and still,  
At certain famous leaders of that hour  
On their raised daïs. Henslow in the midst,  
Their president, gentle, tolerant, reverent,  
    kind,  
Darwin's old tutor, scientist and half-saint;  
Owen beside him, crabbed as John Knox,  
And dry as his dead bones; bland Wilber-  
force,  
The great smooth Bishop of Oxford, pledged  
    and primed  
To make an end of Darwin, once for all.  
Not far away, a little in shadow, sat  
A strange young man, tall, slight, with keen  
    dark eyes,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Who might, in the irresponsible way of youth,  
Defend an absent thinker. Let him beware.  
There was a balance of power in science, too,  
Which would resent disturbance. He'd be  
crushed

By sheer weight of authority, then set,  
Duly submissive, in his proper place.  
His name was Huxley.

A square close-crowded room,  
It held, in little, a concentrated world,  
Imaging, on a microcosmic stage,  
The doubts, the fears, the jealousies, and dull  
hates

That now beset one lonely soul at Down;  
But imaging, also, dauntless love of truth  
In two or three, the bearers of the fire.

Henslow, subdued, with twenty reticent words  
That, in their mere formality, seemed aware  
Of silent dark momentous currents flowing  
Under the trivial ripple of use and wont,  
Called on Daubeny, first, for his discourse  
On Sex in Flowers, and their descent through  
time.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Daubeny, glancing over his glasses, bowed  
And twinkled a wise physician's rosy smile,  
As one of his many parts; an all-round man,  
Sound Latinist and an excellent judge of wine,  
Humanist and geologist, who had tracked  
Guettard through all his craters in Auvergne,  
And, afterwards, with a map in his right hand,  
And Ovid's 'Ars Amoris' in his left,  
Traced the volcanic chains through Hungary,  
Italy, Transylvania, and returned  
To Oxford, as her botanist at the last,  
With silvery hair, but otherwise unchanged,  
Oxford in bloom and Oxford to the core.  
Swimming serene in academic air,  
With open mind and non-committal phrase  
He proved he knew how little all men know;  
And whoso kept that little to himself  
Could never be caught tripping.

Then he smiled,  
And so remained the wisest of them all.

For half an hour the sexes of the flowers  
Danced from his learned discourse, through  
the minds

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Of half his feminine hearers, like a troop  
Of Bacchanals, blowing kisses.

In the crowd  
I saw, at the whimsical chuckle of Shadow-of-  
a-Leaf,

The large-eyed spinster with the small pursed  
mouth,

Eliza Pym of Woodstock, who desired  
To know about the wild flowers that she  
drew

In delicate water-colours for her friends.

She sat bolt upright, innocently amazed  
And vaguely trepidant in her hooped green  
gown.

What? Even the flowers? How startling  
was the sound

Of pistil! Awed, intent, she caught at clues;  
Meticulously quivering at the thought  
Of bees; and blushing deeply when he spoke  
In baritone of male virtue in the rose.

Through all, the evasive academic phrase,  
Putting out vaguely sensitive tentacles  
That instantly withdrew from what they  
touched,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Implied that he could view, quite unper-  
turbed,

All theories, and remain detached, aloft  
Among the gods, in philosophic calm;  
Nay, by his critical logic was endowed  
With something loftier.

What were gods to him,  
Who, being ephemeral, mortal, born to die,  
Could, over the port of Corpus and All Souls  
Mellowed in classic cellars, quiz the powers  
That doomed him, as the aristocrat of thought  
Looks through ironical lorgnettes at the might  
Of Demos round his tumbril. They lived on,  
Wasting their nectar, wrecking worlds on  
worlds.

He had risen, at least, superior to all that.  
He held it somewhat barbarous, vulgar, crude  
To wallow in such profusion as the gods.  
All this implied, not spoken; for he found  
His final causes in his dry pressed flowers;  
Proved that he knew—none better—all the  
tribe  
Who had dragged a net of Latin through the  
fields;

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Proved that some flowers, at least, had never  
changed

Through many centuries. The black-seeded  
poppy

Was known to Homer. He rolled out the  
lines.

Almonds, the bitter-kernelled and the sweet,  
Were tasted by the prophets; and he found  
White-seeded sesamum, in the night of time,  
Among the old Egyptians. . . .

He showed that, while his library was vast,  
Fragrant with leather, crested, tooled, and  
gilt,

He had closed the Book of Nature, and, on  
the whole,

Despite his open mind, dismissed the views  
Of this—er—new philosopher, with a smile  
That, don-wise, almost seemed to ask aloud,  
“Who is he, after all?” Not one of *us*.

Why weigh his facts, then, further, since we  
hold

The official seals of truth in this our time.  
Such men are always wrong. They come and  
go.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

The breeze would soon blow over.

All this implied,  
Not spoken, in that small dry steady smile,  
Doctor Daubeny gathered up his tails  
And made one definite and emphatic point  
By sitting down, while some eight hundred  
hands  
Acclaimed his perfect don-hood.

Henslow rose,  
A little nervously. Had much pleasure,  
though . . .  
And turned to Mr. Huxley. Would he  
speak?  
A whisper passed, a queer new stillness  
gripped  
The expectant crowd. The clock ticked audi-  
bly  
*Not yet, not yet!* A sense of change at  
hand  
Stole through the silence, like the first cool  
breath  
That, over a great ship's company at night,  
Steals through the port-holes from the open  
sea.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Then, with sure foresight, seeing the clash to come,  
The strange young man with the determined mouth  
And quick dark eyes rose grimly, and flung down  
A single sentence, like a gyve of steel  
Wrenched from the wrists to set the strong hands free  
For whatsoever need might rise, if clock  
And *Zeitgeist* changed their quiet *Not Yet* to *Now*.

*“A general audience, sir, where sentiment  
May interfere, unduly interfere,  
With intellect”—as a thin steel wire drawn  
tight*  
By an iron winch, the hush grew tense and rang  
Low, hard, clear, cold—“*is not a fitting place  
For this discussion.*”

Silence, and the clock,  
Two great allies, the surest of them all,  
Dead silence, and the voice *Not Yet, Not Yet*,  
A cough, the creak of the chair as he sat down,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

A shuffle of feet, the chairman's baffled face,  
Then little indignant mutterings round the  
hall,  
Turning to gasps of mockery. Insolence?—  
no,—

Sheer weakness, full retreat!

The Bishop raised  
His eye-brows, looked at the dense disflat-  
tered crowds,  
And had no further fear. The battle was  
won.

Victory, of the only kind he knew,  
Was in his hands. Retreat must now be  
turned

Into full rout. He glanced at Owen,—met  
His little sardonic smile with a wise nod,  
As if to say, "Ah, just as we foresaw."  
Excited clerics caught the flying hint  
And whispered, eyes agog—"You noticed  
that?

He's a great man, the Bishop? What a brow!  
And Owen, too. Of course, they know; they  
know;

And understand each other, thick as thieves."

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Then Owen rose; waved Huxley's empty excuse

Remorselessly aside; and plunged right on,  
Declaring there were facts, whereby the crowd

Could very fitly judge.

The crowd's own feet  
Tapped a benign applause.

Then came the facts,  
Facts from a realm that Huxley had made his own.

*The brain of the gorilla*—some one turned  
A faint hysterical laugh into a sneeze—  
*Linked it more closely to the lowest groups*  
*Of QUADRUMANA.*

“Quadru—what-did-he-say?”  
Whispered Miss Pym unconsciously to herself,  
“Mana, four-handed,” clerical whiskers breathed,  
With Evangelical titillance in her ear,  
“Apes, monkeys, all the things that climb up trees.  
Says the gorilla's more like them than us.”

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

“Thank you.” Eliza Pym inclined her head  
A little stiffly.

Had the world gone mad?  
Was some one in the background trying to find  
A pedigree for mankind among the brutes?  
Absurd, of course, and yet—one must confess  
How like they were in some things. Unto  
each  
A mouth, a nose, two eyes, flesh, blood, and  
bones  
Of the same pattern.

Comic enough, and weird;  
But what became of Genesis, then, and God?  
If all these whiskered men but one or two  
So utterly disbelieved it, why discuss  
Degrees of kinship? Surely the gulf was fixed  
Wide as the severance between heaven and  
hell.

Then, in one dreadful gleam, she seemed to  
see

The rows of whiskered listeners, darkly  
perched,  
Herself among them, on long swaying boughs,  
Mesmerised, and all dumbly staring down

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

With horrible fascination at great eyes,  
Green moons of cruelty, steadily smouldering,  
In depths that—smelt of tigers; or the salts  
Unstoppered by the vicar's wife in front.

Smile at Eliza Pym with Shadow-of-a-Leaf;  
But only if your inward sight can see  
Her memories, too—a child's uplifted face,  
The clean white cot, the fluttering nursery  
fire;

Old days, old faces, teaching her those lines  
From Blake, about a Lamb. Yet that—why  
that

Might be the clue they lacked in all this talk  
Of our dumb kinsfolk. If she could but speak  
And—hint it! Why don't Bishops think of  
things

Like that, she wondered.

Owen resumed his chair  
With loud applause.

That grim young man again,  
Huxley, was on his feet, his dark eyes lit  
With thrice the vital power of all the rest.  
In one cool sentence, like a shining lance,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

He touched the centre of his opponent's shield,  
And ended all the shuffling, all the doubts  
Of where he stood, how far he dared to go,  
If truth required it. He could not accept  
Those facts from any authority; gave direct  
Unqualified contradiction to those facts;  
And pledged himself to justify this course,  
Unusual as it seemed perhaps—elsewhere.  
“Elsewhere,” and as he said it, came a gleam  
Into his face, reflected from the heights  
Where a tribunal sits whose judgment holds  
Not for the fleeting moment, but all time.

“Elsewhere”—the Bishop smiled. He had not  
caught

That gleam. “Elsewhere” was only another  
sign

Of weakness, even timidity perhaps,  
And certainly retreat, not from the truth  
(He felt so sure of that) but from the might  
And deep resources of the established powers  
Whose influence ruled the world.

“Elsewhere” for him

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Meant Saturday, and here. The lists were set,

The battle joined, and the great issue plain,—  
Whether the human race came straight from God,

Or traced its dark descent back to the brute,  
And left his creed a wreck of hollow towers,  
The haunt of bats and owls. His time to strike  
Would come on Saturday. Pleadings of “elsewhere”

Would not avail. He set his jaw. Please God,

He meant to drive this victory crashing home,  
And make an end of Darwin once for all.  
So closed the first strange scene.

The rumour spread  
Everywhere, of the Bishop’s grim intent.  
Saturday’s crowd, an hour before its time  
Choked all the doors, and crammed the long  
west hall.

Black-coated members of all shades of thought,  
Knowledge and doubt and bigotry, crushed  
their sides

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

In chair-packed rows together (Eliza Pym  
Among them, with her startled innocent eyes).  
A bevy of undergraduates at the back,  
Quietly thoughtful, held their watching brief  
For youth and for the future. Fame to come  
Already touched the brows of a rare few  
With faint leaf-shadows of her invisible  
wreath:

Green, the philosopher, gazing at the world  
With youth's aloofness, and that inward light  
Which shines from Oxford still; not far away  
The young historian of the coloured stream  
Of outward life, the ancestral pageantry  
Of England, and its tributary rills  
Flowing in dawn-gleams out of the mists of  
time.

There, too, in front, with atavistic face  
And Vandyke beard, so oddly like the king  
Who loved Nell Gwynne, sat Admiral Fitz-  
Roy,

Late captain of the *Beagle*, quite prick-eared  
With personal curiosity. Twice he told  
His neighbour that, by George, he wouldn't  
ha' missed

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

This Donnybrook Fair for anything. He had  
sailed

With Darwin round the world. They used to  
call him

The old philosopher. Heard the bosun once,  
Pointing the officers out—damned funny it  
was!—

“That’s Captain FitzRoy. That’s the second  
mate;

And *that*”—pointing a thumb at Darwin’s  
back—

“*That’s* our Fly-Catcher!”

Best of fellows, too,  
But queer. He’d tell you, in the simplest  
way

—As if it meant no more than pass the salt,—  
Something that knocked you endways; calmly  
shift

A mountain-range, in half a dozen words,  
And sink it in the sea.

In fact, FitzRoy  
Felt it his duty more than once, by George,  
To expostulate; told him plainly he’d upset  
*Genesis* and the Church; and then there’d be

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

The devil and all to pay. And now, by  
George,  
He'd done it; and her Majesty's Admiral  
Had come on purpose, all the way from town,  
To hear and see the end of it.

So he said,  
Not wholly understanding why he came,—  
The memory of a figure rapt and bowed  
Over a shell, or finding in the rocks,  
As though by wizardry, relics of lost worlds;  
Moments that, by a hardly noticed phrase,  
Had touched with orderly meaning and new  
light

The giant flaws and foldings in the hills;  
Moments when, in the cabin, he had stared  
Into the “old philosopher’s” microscope,  
And seen the invisible speck in a water-  
drop

Grow to a great rose-window of radiant life  
In an immense cathedral.

Vaguely enough,  
Perhaps in the dimmest hinterland of his  
mind,

There lurked a quiet suspicion that, after all,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

His queer old friend *had* hit on something queer.

Three places off, his face a twinkling mask  
Of keen Scots humour, Robert Chambers  
glanced

Quietly at his watch, to hide a smile  
When some one who had “written the Ves-  
tiges,”

And only half denied it, met his eye.

The vacant platform glared expectancy,  
And held the gaze now of the impatient  
crowd.

Then Henslow led the conquering Bishop in.  
Two rows of clerics, halfway down the hall,  
Drummed for their doughty champion with  
their heels.

Above, in each recessed high window-seat,  
Bishop-adoring ladies clapped their hands.

The rest filed in, mere adjuncts, modest foils.  
Hooker and Lubbock and Huxley took their  
chairs

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

On Henslow's left. The beautiful gaitered legs,  
By their divine prerogative, on his right,  
So carelessly crossed, more eloquently than words  
Assured the world that everything was well,  
And their translation into forms of speech  
A mere formality. Next to the Bishop sat  
A Transatlantic visitor with a twang,  
One Doctor Draper, his hard wrinkled skin  
Tinged by the infinite coffee he absorbed,  
A gaunt bone-coloured desert, unassuaged.  
He was a grim diplomatist, as befits  
A pilgrim of the cosmos; ready at Rome  
To tickle the Romans; and, if bishops ruled,  
And found themselves at odds with freeborn souls  
Outside the Land of Freedom, he'd befriend  
Bishops, bring in the New World, stars and all,  
To rectify that balance, and take home  
For souvenir, with a chip of the pyramids,  
The last odd homages of the obsequious Old.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

The president called him for his opening speech.

He stood and beamed, enjoying to the full  
The sense that, with his mighty manuscript,  
He could delay the antagonists for an hour.

He cleared his throat. He took from a little  
box

A small black lozenge; popped it into his  
mouth,

Leisurely rolled it under a ruminant tongue,  
Then placidly drawled his most momentous  
words:

*“Proh-fessur Henslow, Bishop Wilbur-force,  
Members, AND friends, in this historic hall,  
I assk first, AIR we a fort ooitous  
Con-course of atoms?”* Half unconsciously,  
He struck at once to the single central heart  
Of all the questions asked by every age;  
As though he saw what only Shadow-of-a-  
Leaf

Had watched last night, as in a crystal  
globe,

That scene preparing, the interweaving clues  
Whose inconceivable intricacy at length,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

By "chance," as blind men call it, through the  
maze

Of life and time, at the one right juncture  
brought

Two shadows, face to face, in an Oxford  
Street,

Chambers and Huxley. "You'll be there to-  
morrow?"—

"No, I leave Oxford now."—

"The enemy means  
To annihilate Darwin. You will not desert  
us?"—

"If you say that, I stay."

Each to his place  
Had moved in his own orbit, like a star,  
Or like an atom, free-will at one with law,  
In the unplanned plan of the Master-Drama-  
tist,

Where Doctor Draper blindly played his  
part

And asked his pregnant question. He droned  
on,

For one enormous hour, starkly maintained  
That Europe, in its intellectual life,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

By mere “fortooity,” never could have flowered

To such results as blushed before him there  
In that historic hall of halls to-night.

If Darwin thought so, he took leave to stand  
Beside them, and to smile the vast calm smile  
Of Arizona’s desert distances,

Till all such dragon thoughts had coiled  
away.

He took his chair. The great debate began.  
For prelude came a menacing growl of storm.  
A furious figure rose, like a sperm-whale,  
Out of the seething audience. A huge man,  
With small, hot, wicked eyes and cavernous  
mouth,

Bellowed his own ferocious claim to speak  
On economic grounds. He had subscribed  
His guineas, ringing guineas of red gold,  
Ungrudgingly for years; but prophesied  
Withdrawal of all such guineas, on all sides,  
From this Association, if it failed  
To brand these most abominable views  
As blasphemous, bearing on their devilish  
brows,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Between their horns, the birth-mark of the Beast.

This last word hissed, he sank again. At once, Ere Henslow found his feet or spoke a word, Up leapt a raw-boned parson from the North, To seize his moment's fame. With sawing arm

The Reverend Dingle, like a windmill, vowed He'd prove upon the blackboard, in white chalk,

By diagram—and the chalk was in his hand—  
“That mawnkey and mahn had separate pedigrees.

Let A here be the mawnkey, and B the mahn.”  
Loud laughter; shouts of “mawnkey!” and  
“sit down”

Extinguished him. He sat; and Henslow quelled

The hubbub with one clarion-clear demand,  
Dictated, surely, by the ironic powers  
Who had primed the Bishop and prepared his fall:

*“Gentlemen, this discussion now must rest  
On scientific grounds.”*

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

At once there came  
Calls for the Bishop, who, rising from his  
chair,  
Urged by the same invisible ironies,  
Remarked that his old friend, Professor  
Beale,  
Had something to say *first*. That weighty  
first  
Conveyed the weight of his own words to  
come.  
Urged still by those invisible ones, his friend  
Dug the pit deeper; modestly declared,  
Despite his keen worn face and shoulders  
bowed  
In histologic vigils, that he felt  
His knowledge quite inadequate; and the way  
Was made straight—for the Bishop.  
The Bishop rose, mellifluous, bland, adroit.

A gesture, lacking only the lawn sleeves  
To make it perfect, delicately conveyed  
His comfortable thought—that what amazed  
The sheepfold must be folly.

Half the throng,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

His own experience told him, had not grasped  
The world-inweaving argument, could not  
think

In æons. Æons, then, would be dismissed  
As vague and airy fantasies. He might choose  
His facts at will, unchallenged. He stood  
there

Secure that his traditions could not fail,  
Basing his faith on schemes of thought de-  
signed

By authorised “thinkers” in pure artistry,  
As free from Nature’s law as coloured blocks  
That children play with on the nursery  
hearth,

And puzzle about and shift and twist and turn  
Until the beautiful picture, as ordained,  
Comes out, exact to the pattern, and reveals  
The artificer’s plan, the pattern, as arranged,  
By bishops, politic statesmen, teachers, guides,  
Who hold it in reserve, their final test  
Of truth, for times like this. He had been so  
sure

Of something deeper than all schemes of  
thought

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

That he had all too lightly primed himself  
With "facts" to match their fables; hastily  
crammed

Into his mind's convenient travelling bag  
(Sound leather, British) all that he re-  
quired,—

Not truth, but "a good argument." He had  
asked

Owen, who hated Huxley, to provide it;  
And he had brought it with him,—not the  
truth,

Not even facts, those unrelated crumbs  
Of truth, the abiding consecrated whole.

He had brought his borrowed "facts," misun-  
derstood,

To meet, for the first time in all his life,  
Stark earnest thought, wrestling for truth  
alone,

As men on earth discerned it. He had prayed,  
With something deeper than blind make-be-  
lieve,

*Thy will be done on earth;* and yet, and yet,  
The law wherein that will might be discerned,  
The law wherein that unity of heaven

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And earth might yet be found (could he but trust

The truth, could he believe that his own God Lived in the living truth), he waved aside.

These others had not found it, but they kept One faith that he had lost. Though it should slay them,

They trusted in the truth. They could not see Where it might lead them. Only at times they felt

As they deciphered the dark Book of Earth That, following its majestic rhythm of law, They followed the true path, the eternal way Of That which reigns. Prophetic flashes came.

Words that the priest mechanically intoned Burned upon Huxley's keen ironical page Like sudden sapphires, drawing their deeper light

From that celestial City which endures Because it hath foundations: *Shall I come Before the Eternal with burnt offerings?*  
*Hath not the Eternal showed thee what is good,*

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

*That thou do justly and mercifully, and walk  
Humbly with the Eternal?*

O, irony of the Master-dramatist,  
Who set once more those lists; and sent His  
truth  
Unrecognised, as of old, to fight for life  
And prove itself in struggle and raise once  
more  
A nobler world above the world out-worn,  
Crushing all easy sophistry, though it stood  
Garbed as the priest of God.

The Bishop seized  
His diplomatic vantage. The blunt truth  
Of Huxley's warning offered itself to him  
As a rash gambit in their game of—tact.  
He seized it; gracefully smoothed the ruffled  
pride  
Of that great audience, trained in a sound  
school  
To judge by common-sense.

His mobile face  
Revealed much that his politic words con-  
cealed.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

His strength was in that sound old British  
way—

Derision of all things that transcend its codes  
In life, thought, art; the moon-calf's happy  
creed

That, if a moon-calf only sees the moon  
In thoughts that range the cosmos, his broad  
grin

Sums the whole question; there's no more to  
see.

In all these aids, an innocent infidel,  
The Bishop put his trust; and, more than all,  
In vanity, the vacant self-conceit

That, when it meets the masters of the mind  
And finds them bowed before the Inscrutable  
Power,

Accepts their reverence and humility  
As tribute, due acknowledgment of fool's  
right

To give the final judgment, and annul  
The labour of a life-time in an hour.

Dulcetly, first, he scoffed at Darwin's facts.

“Rock-pigeons now were what they had al-  
ways been.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Species had never changed. What were the proofs

Even of the variation they required  
To make this theory possible? We had heard  
Mysterious rumours of a long-legged sheep  
Somewhere in Yorkshire (laughter). Let me  
ask

Professor Huxley, here upon the left  
(All eyes on Huxley), who believes himself  
Descended from an ape (chuckles of glee),  
How recently this happened."

The Bishop turned,  
All smiling insolence, "May I beg to know  
If this descent is on your father's side,  
Or on your mother's?"

He paused, to let the crowd  
Bellow its laughter. The unseen ironies  
Had trapped him and his flock; and neither  
knew.

But Huxley knew. He turned, with a grim  
smile,  
And while the opposing triumph rocked and  
pealed,  
Struck one decisive palm upon his knee,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And muttered low—“*The Lord hath delivered him  
Into my hands.*”

His neighbour stared and thought  
His wits were wandering. Yet that undertone  
Sounded more deadly, had more victory in it,  
Than all the loud-mouthed minute’s dying  
roar.

It died to a tense hush. The Bishop closed  
In solemn diapason. Darwin’s views  
Degraded woman. They debased mankind,  
And contradicted God’s most Holy Word.  
Applause! Applause! The hall a quivering  
mist  
Of clapping hands. From every windowseat  
A flutter of ladies’ handkerchiefs and shrill  
cries  
As of white swarming sea-gulls. The black  
rows  
Of clerics all exchanging red-faced nods,  
And drumming with their feet, as though to  
fill  
A hundred-pedalled organ with fresh wind.

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

The Bishop, like a *Gloire de Dijon* rose  
With many-petalled smiles, his plump right  
hand

Clasped in a firm congratulatory grip  
Of hickory-bones by Draper of New York;  
Who had small faith in what the Bishop said  
But heard the cheers, and gripped him as a  
man

Who never means to let this good thing go.  
Motionless, on the left, the observant few,  
The silent delegates of a sterner power,  
With grave set faces, quietly looking on.  
At last the tumult, as all tumult must,  
Sank back to that deep silence. Henslow  
turned

To Huxley without speaking. Once again  
The clock ticked audibly, but its old “Not  
Yet”

Had somehow, in that uproar, in the face  
Of that tumultuous mockery, changed to  
*Now!*

The lean tall figure of Huxley quietly rose.  
He looked for a moment thoughtfully at the  
crowd;

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Saw rows of hostile faces; caught the grin  
Of ignorant curiosity; here and there,  
A hopeful gleam of friendship; and, far back,  
The young, swift-footed, waiting for the fire.  
He fixed his eyes on these—then, in low tones,  
Clear, cool, incisive, "*I have come here,*" he  
said,  
*"In the cause of Science only."*

He paused again.  
Then, striking the mockery out of the mock-  
er's face,  
His voice rang out like steel—

"I have heard nothing  
To prejudice the case of my august  
Client, who, as I told you, is not here."  
At once a threefold picture flashed upon me,  
A glimpse, far off, through eyes of Shadow-  
of-a-Leaf,  
First, of a human seeker, there at Down,  
Gathering his endless cloud of witnesses  
From rocks, from stones, from trees; and from  
the signs

In man's own body of life's æonian way;  
But, far above him, clothed with purer light,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

The stern, majestic Spirit of living Truth;  
And, more august than even his prophets  
knew,  
Through that eternal Spirit, the primal  
Power  
Returning into a world of faiths out-worn.

Once more, as he spoke on, a thousand years  
Were but as yesterday. If these truths were  
true,  
This theory flooded the whole world with  
light.

Could we believe that the Creator set  
In mockery all these birth-signs in the world,  
Or once in a million years had wrecked His  
work

'And shaped, in a flash, a myriad lives anew,  
Bearing in their own bodies all the signs  
Of their descent from those that He de-  
stroyed?

Who left that ancient leaf within the flower?  
Who hid within the reptile those lost fins,  
And under the skin of the sea-floundering  
whale

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

The bones of the lost thigh? Who dusked the foal  
With shadowy stripes, and under its hoof concealed  
Those ancient birdlike feet of its lost kin?  
Who matched that hoof with a rosy fingernail,  
Or furled that point within the human ear?  
Who had imprinted in the body of man,  
And in his embryo, all those intricate signs  
Of his forgotten lineage, even those gills  
Through which he drew his breath once in the sea?

The speaker glanced at his antagonist.  
"You think all this too marvellous to be true;  
Yet you believe in miracles. You think  
The unfolding of this complicated life  
Around us, out of a simple primal form,  
Impossible; yet you know that every man  
Before his birth, a few brief years ago,  
Was once no more than a single living cell.  
You think it ends your theory of creation.  
You say that God made *you*; and yet you know

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

—And reconcile your creed with what you know—

That you yourself originally”—he held up A gleaming pencil-case—“were a little piece Of matter, not so large as the end of this.

But if you ask, in fine, Whether I'd be ashamed to claim descent From that poor animal with the stooping gait And low intelligence, who can only grin And chatter as we pass by, or from a *man* Who could use high position and great gifts To crush one humble seeker after truth— I hesitate, but”—an outburst of applause From all who understood him drowned the words.

He paused. The clock ticked audibly again. Then, quietly measuring every word, he drove The sentence home. “I asserted and repeat A man would have no cause to feel ashamed Of being descended through vast tracts of time From that poor ape.

Were there an ancestor Whom I could not recall without a sense

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Of shame, it were a *man*, so placed, so gifted,  
Who sought to sway his hearers from the truth  
By aimless eloquence and by skilled appeals  
To their religious prejudice."

Was it the truth  
That conquered, or the blind sense of the blow  
Justly considered, delivered, and driven  
home,  
That brought a crash of applause from half  
the house?  
And more (for even the outright enemy  
Joined in that hubbub), though indignant  
cries,  
Protested vainly, "Abominable to treat  
The Bishop so!"

The Bishop sat there dumb.  
Eliza Pym, adding her own quaint touch  
Of comedy, saw that pencil shine again  
In Huxley's hand; compared it, at a glance  
Of fawn-like eyes, with the portentous form  
In gaiters; felt the whole world growing  
strange;  
Drew one hysterical breath, and swooned  
away.

# V

## THE *VERA CAUSA*

AND yet, and yet, the victor knew too well  
His victory had a relish of the dust.  
Even while the plaudits echoed in his ears,  
It troubled him. When he pondered it that  
night,  
A finer shame had touched him. He had used  
The weapons of his enemy at the last;  
And, if he had struck his enemy down for  
truth,  
He had struck him down with weapons he de-  
spised.  
He had used them with a swifter hand and  
eye,  
A subtler cunning; and he had set his heel  
On those who took too simply to their hearts  
A tale, whose ancient imagery enshrined  
A mystery that endured. He had proclaimed  
A fragment of a truth which, he knew well,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

Left the true Cause in darkness. Did he  
know

More of that Cause than *Genesis*? Could he  
see

Farther into that darkness than the child  
Folding its hands in prayer?

More clearly far  
Than Darwin, whom he had warned of it, he  
knew

The bounds of this new law; bade him be-  
ware

Of his repeated dogma—*Nature makes*  
*No leap*. He pointed always to the Abyss  
Of darkness round the flickering spark of light  
Upheld by Science. Had Wilberforce been  
armed

With knowledge and the spiritual steel  
Of Saint Augustine, who had also seen,  
Even in his age, a ladder of life to heaven,  
There had been a victory of another kind  
To lighten through the world.

And Darwin knew it;  
But, while he marshalled his unnumbered  
truths,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

He lost the Truth; as one who takes command  
Of multitudinous armies in the night,  
And strives to envisage, in one sweep of the mind,  
Each squadron and each regiment of the whole,  
Ever the host that swept through his mind's eye,  
Though all in ordered ranks and files, obscured  
Army on army the infinite truth beyond.  
The gates of Beauty closed against his mind,  
And barred him out from that eternal realm,  
Whose lucid harmonies on our night bestow  
Glimpses of absolute knowledge from above;  
Unravelling and ennobling, making clear  
Much that had baffled us, much that else was dark;  
So that the laws of Nature shine like roads,  
Firm roads that lead through a significant world  
Not downward, from the greater to the less,  
But up to the consummate soul of all.

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

He could not follow them now. Back, back  
and back,  
He groped along the dark diminishing road.  
The ecstasy of music died away.  
The poet's vision melted into a dream.  
He knew his loss, and mourned it; but it  
marred  
Not only his own happiness, as he thought.  
It blurred his vision, even of his own truths.

He looked long at the butterfly's radiant  
wings,  
Pondered their blaze of colour, and believed  
That butterfly wooers choosing their bright  
mates  
Through centuries of attraction and desire  
Evolved this loveliness. For he only saw  
The blaze of colour, the flash that lured the  
eye.  
He did not see the exquisite pattern there,  
The diamonded fans of the under-wing,  
Inlaid with intricate harmonies of design;  
The delicate little octagons of pearl,  
The moons like infinitesimal fairy flowers,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

The lozenges of gold, and grey, and blue  
All ordered in an intellectual scheme,  
Where form to form responded and faint  
lights

Echoed faint lights, and shadowy fringes ran  
Like Elfin curtains on a silvery thread,  
Shadow replying to shadow through the  
whole.

Did eyes of the butterfly wooer mark all  
this,—

A subtlety too fine for half mankind?  
He tossed a shred of paper on to his lawn;  
He saw the white wings blindly fluttering  
round it.

He did not hear the whisper of Shadow-of-a-  
Leaf,

*Was this their exquisite artistry of choice?  
Had wooers like these evolved this loveliness?*

He groped into the orchestral universe  
As one who strives to trace a symphony  
Back to its cause, and with laborious care  
Feels with his hand the wood of the violins,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

And bids you mark—O good, bleak, honest soul,  
So fearful of false hopes!—that all is hollow.  
He tells you on what tree the wood was grown.  
He plucks the catgut, tells you whence it came,  
Gives you the name and pedigree of the cat;  
Nay, even affirms a mystery, and will talk  
Of sundry dark vibrations that affect  
The fleshly instrument of the human ear;  
And so, with a world-excluding accuracy—  
O, never doubt that every step was true!—  
Melts the great music into less than air  
And misses everything.

Everything! On one side  
The music soaring endlessly through heavens  
Within the human soul; on the other side,  
The unseen Composed of whose transcendent life

The music speaks in souls made still to hear.  
He clung to his *vera causa*. In that law  
He saw the way of the Power, but not the Power

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

Determining the way. Did men reject  
The laws of Newton, binding all the worlds,  
Because they still knew nothing of the Power  
That bound them? The stone fell. He knew  
not why.

The sun controlled the planets, and the law  
Was constant; but the mystery of it was  
masked

Under a name; and no man knew the Power  
That gripped the worlds in that unchanging  
bond,

Or whether, in the twinkling of an eye,  
The Power might not release them from that  
bond,

As a hand opens, and the wide universe  
Change in a flash, and vanish like a shadow,  
As prophets had foretold.

He could not think  
That chance decreed the boundless march of  
law

He saw in the starry heavens. Yet he could  
think

Of "chance" on earth; and, while he thought,  
declare

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

“Chance” was not “chance” but law unrecognised;

Then, even while he said it, he would use  
The ambiguous word, base his own law on  
“chance”;

And, even while he used it, there would move  
Before his eyes in every flake of colour,  
Inlaid upon the butterfly’s patterned wing,  
Legions of atoms wheeling each to its place  
In ever constant law; and he knew well  
That, even in the living eye that saw them,  
The self-same Power that bound the starry  
worlds

Controlled a myriad atoms, every one  
An ordered system; and in every cloud  
Of wind-blown dust and every breaking  
wave

Upon the storm-tossed sea, an infinite host  
Of infinitesimal systems moved by law  
Each to its place; and, in each growing flower,  
Myriads of atoms like concentrated suns  
And planets, these to the leaf and those to the  
crown,

Moved in unerring order, and by a law

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

That bound all heights and depths of the universe,

In an unbroken unity. By what Power?

There was one Power, one only known to man,  
That could determine action. Herschel knew  
it;

The power whereby the mind uplifts the hand  
And lets it fall, the living personal Will.

Ah, but his task, his endless task on earth,  
Bent his head earthward. He must find the  
way

Before he claimed the heights. No Newton  
he;

Though men began to acclaim him and his  
law

As though they solved all mysteries and an-  
nulled

All former creeds, and changed the heart of  
heaven.

No Newton he; not even a Galileo;  
But one who patiently, doggedly laboured on,  
As Tycho Brahe laboured in old days,  
Numbering the stars, recording fact on fact,

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

For those, who, after centuries, might discern

The meaning and the cause of what he saw.

Visions of God and Heaven were not for him,

Unless his “facts” revealed them, as the crown Of his own fight for knowledge.

It might be

The final test of man, the narrow way

Proving him worthy of immortal life,

That he should face this darkness and this death

Worthily and renounce all easy hope,

All consolation, all but the wintry smile

Upon the face of Truth as he discerns it,

Here upon earth, his only glimmer of light,

Leading him onward to an end unknown.

Faith! Faith! O patient, inarticulate soul,

If this were faithlessness, there was a Power,

So whispered Shadow-of-a-Leaf, that shared it with him;

The Power that bowed His glory into darkness

To make a world in suffering and in death,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

The passionate price that even the Omnipotent  
Must pay for love, and love's undying crown.

He hardly heard the whisper; could not hear  
it

And keep his own resolve. He bowed his  
head

In darkness; and, henceforth, those inward  
gates

Into the realms of the supernal light  
Began to close.

He knew that they were closing;  
And yet—was this the dark key to Creation?—

He shared the ecstasy also; shared that sense  
Of triumph; broke the Bread and drank the  
Wine

In sacred drops and morsels of the truth;  
Shared, in renouncement of all else but  
truth,

A sense that he could never breathe in words  
To any one else, a sense that in this age  
It was expedient that a man should lose

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

The glory, and die this darker new-found  
death,  
To save the people from their rounded creeds,  
Their faithless faith, and crowns too lightly  
won.

\* \* \* \* \*

O, yet the memory of one midnight hour!  
*Would that she knew. Would God that she  
knew now . . .*

Truer than all his knowledge was that cry;  
The cry of the blind life struggling through  
the dark,  
Upward . . . the blind brow lifted to the un-  
seen.

He groped along the dark unending way  
And saw, although he knew not what he saw,  
Out of the struggle of life, a mightier law  
Emerging; and, when man could rise no  
higher

By the fierce law of Nature, he beheld  
Nature herself at war against herself.

He heard, although he knew not what he  
heard,

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

A Voice that, triumphing over her clashing chords,  
Resolved them into an infinite harmony.  
Whose was that Voice? What Power within the flesh  
Cast off the flesh for a glory in the mind,  
And leapt to victory in self-conquering love?  
What Voice, whose Power, cast Nature underfoot  
In Bruno, when the flames gnawed at his flesh;  
In Socrates; and, in those obscure Christs  
Who daily die; and, though none other sees,  
Lay hands upon the wheel of the universe  
And master it; and the sun stands dark at noon?  
These things he saw but dimly. All his life  
He moved along the steep and difficult way  
Of Truth in darkness; but the Voice of Truth  
Whispered in darkness, out of the mire and clay,  
And through the blood-stained agony of the world,  
“Fear nothing. Follow Me. *I am the Way.*”

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

So, when Death touched him also, and Eng-  
land bore  
His dust into her deepening innermost shrine,  
The Voice he heard long since, and could not  
hear,  
Rose like the fuller knowledge, given by  
Death  
To one that could best lead him upward now,  
Rose like a child's voice, opening up the  
heavens,  
*I am the Resurrection and the Life.*

## X—EPILOGUE

UP the Grand Canyon the full morning  
flowed.

I heard the voices moving through the  
abyss

With the deep sound of pine-woods, league on  
league

Of singing boughs, each separate, each a  
voice,

Yet all one music;

*The Eternal Mind*

*Enfolds all changes, and can never change.*

*Man is not exiled from this Majesty,  
The inscrutable Reality, which he shares  
In his immortal essence. Man that doubts  
All but the sensuous veils of colour and sound,  
The appearances that he can measure and  
weigh,  
Trusts, as the very fashioner of his doubt,*

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

*The imponderable thought that weighs the worlds,*

*The invisible thought that sees; thought that reveals*

*The miracle of the eternal paradox—*

*The pure unsearchable Being that cannot be  
Yet IS, and still creates and governs all;*

*A Power that, being unknowable, is best known;*

*For this transcendent Being can reply*

*To every agony, "I am that which waits*

*Beyond the last horizon of your pain,*

*Beyond your wildest hope, your last despair,  
Above your heaven, and deeper than your hell.*

*There is not room on earth for what ye seek.  
Is there not room in Me?"*

*Time is a shadow  
Of man's own thought. Things past and  
things to come*

*Are closed in that full circle. He lives and  
reigns;*

*Dies with the dying bird; and, in its death  
Receives it to His heart. No leaf can fall*

## THE BOOK OF EARTH

*Without Him; who, for ever pouring out  
His passion into worlds that shall attain  
Love in the highest at last, returns for ever  
Along these roads of suffering and of death,  
With all their lives upgathered to His heart  
Into the heaven of heavens. How else could  
life*

*Lay hold on its infinitude, or win  
The strength to walk with Love in complete  
light?*

*For, as a child that learns to walk on earth,  
Life learns these little rhythms of earthly law,  
Listens to simple seas that ebb and flow,  
And spells the large bright order of the stars  
Wherein the moving Reason is revealed  
To man's up-struggling mind, or breathed like  
song*

*Into the quiet heart, as love to love.  
So, step by step, the spirit of man ascends  
Through joy and grief; and is withdrawn by  
death*

*From the sweet dust that might content it here  
Into His kingdom, the one central goal  
Of the universal agony. He lives.*

## THE TORCH-BEARERS

*He lives and reigns, throned above Space and Time;  
And, in that realm, freedom and law are one;  
Fore-knowledge and all-knowledge and free-will,  
Make everlasting music.*

Far away

Along the unfathomable abyss it flowed,  
A harmony so consummate that it shared  
The silence of the sky; a song so deep  
That only the still soul could hear it now:  
*New every morning the creative Word  
Moves upon chaos. Yea, our God grows young.*

*Here, now, the eternal miracle is renewed  
Now, and for ever, God makes heaven and earth.*



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